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MEN WHO STOOD ALONE

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THE HEBREW PROPHETS IN ACTION

by

MARY JENNESS

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It is a great education—standing alone with your convictions. It is the beginning of true freedom. Some one has said that you cannot know the truth or appreciate its rare beauty until it stands forth in its eternal majesty as your only friend. *The inner peace that is the reward of response to God's call is the prize immediately awarded.*

—Bishop Brent

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CHAPTER I

MEN WHO STOOD ALONE

All night long the war chariots of Syria came thudding south past the cold ravines of Mount Hermon. A squad of cavalry rode in front and a detachment of infantry marched behind. They were on the age-old highway down from Damascus to the Mediterranean, a passage always echoing the clash of arms or the grunts of heavily-laden camels. Not far ahead now, through the Plain of Esdraelon, their way lay clear into the kingdom of Israel. Surely this was the strangest ride in all that trail's history—the shock troops of Damascus pouring down into the mountains of Samaria to capture one man of God!

The youngest charioteer was driving the youngest captain, or he would never have ventured his opinion unasked. Even then he had to shout to make himself heard above the din the springless chariots made in banging over the rocks beyond Jordan. "What a crazy notion," he cried, "sending the flower of the Syrian army all the way down here to capture one Hebrew!" As he threw the words over his shoulder, he was amazed to see that the captain's face was strained and pale in the moonlight.

"He's no common man, that one," was the unexpected reply. "He's got second sight. How else could he warn the king of Israel every single time we plan an ambush? We

have to catch him, or we can't get on with the war—but I am afraid he'll slip through our fingers."

"We don't even know he'll be in Dothan when we get there." From his sceptical tone, the charioteer placed no great faith in the Syrian king's spies.

"Oh, he's there all right," the captain returned nervously. "I can feel him. I wouldn't be surprised if he could see us this minute, riding up into the Plain." For indeed the foremost chariots had crossed the Jordan and were mounting into the Plain of Esdraelon. A bare sixteen mile stretch lay between them and Dothan, in the mountains of Samaria.

"Ho, ho!" laughed the charioteer. "What, see us nearly a score of miles away? From that little nubbin of a hill called Dothan? See north and east from there, right through the mountains between him and us? Why, the king's best scouts couldn't do that!"

The captain's mute, brooding look was more effective than any protest he could have made. In fact, a curious hush fell on the whole moving force from this point. Was it only because the king of Syria had strictly commanded a surprise attack? Or did others share the sense of strange powers in this man of God they had been told to capture?

Dawn found the Syrian troops filing silently around the little hill of Dothan. It rises abruptly from the plateau, high and steep enough so that raiding Bedouins might not approach unnoticed. These troops, however, had come up the pass so silently that as yet the lookout had given no alarm. At the top of the hill slept the little mud-walled village, a hamlet of Hebrew farmers. Around the base were gathered the Damascus troops, ranged as in some ancient

bas-relief—row on row of chariots, rank on rank of horsemen, file on file of foot-soldiers; silent all, facing the hill.

A sudden flash of light sent a thrill through the waiting hosts, as the earliest sunlight struck on moving bronze. A helmet lifted in the front ranks, a hand pointing with a spear—that was the signal! Two men had come up on a housetop close to the wall, a young servant, and a man who walked with striking dignity. The signal pointed out the Man of God, as everyone called him, the prophet Elisha whom the Syrian army had come all this way down to capture. Though the two on the housetop stood defenceless within easy bowshot, not a bow was raised in any chariot. The king's orders had been strict: "Take him alive!"

A striking pantomime followed, enacted high in air above the breathless audience. The servant, a mere boy, caught sight of the terrible array that hemmed them in. He pointed, staggered back as though to flee down the stairs, thought better of that and opened his mouth to shout an alarm. The prophet checked him with a quiet yet commanding gesture. He had not indicated by so much as a flicker that he saw the enemy, and yet every soldier there felt that he was aware of them. The youngest captain was not the only one who gripped the front of a chariot with white knuckles, but no one made a sound.

The strange pantomime moved to a startling climax. The servant rushed around the roof like a trapped rat, he covered his face, at last he sank down in utter panic. What the stately prophet did then was stranger than his silence had been. He raised his arms toward heaven, he spread them deliberately above the encircling host. Then he bent and gently touched the boy's fluttering eyelids.

Only those in the front rank caught his low tones: "O Lord, open the eyes of this young man!"

When Elisha rose, he seemed to look full into the eyes of every waiting soldier. Confused murmurs began to rise, and man after man shrank back as if he had been struck. —"What's he doing?—What did he say?—He's cast a spell on us!—*What has he done to our eyes?*"

Then a voice from the roof rose, strong and tranquil. It rang out over the silent village, around the hill, over and through the quivering army. Its quiet certainty was far more terrifying than threats. "Have no fear, for they that are with us are more than they that are with them."

The young captain could never tell exactly what happened. A sense of power rushing through the air; of unearthly fire flashing on countless points of light—invisible hosts crowding between the army and the mud-walled town!

"Chariots and horsemen of fire!" Someone started a cry that ran through the unnerved host. The youngest captain rubbed his eyes, but a strange numbness held them. He could never capture more than the vague memory of a majestic figure moving calmly down from the housetop, through the town, steadily out through the gate, very slowly down toward that waiting host. . . .

Now every soldier had a different story to tell when the army returned to Damascus, but certain facts are clear. The prophet Elisha with his servant walked in safety that day to his own city of Samaria. As for the Syrian cavalry, chariots and infantry, they too reached home unharmed. And the descendants of the Hebrews tell to this day how one man stood alone on a housetop, guarded by the invisible battalions of God!

Twenty years before Elisha's safe return to Samaria, two kings in full armor sat one morning on thrones in the shadow of Samaria's southern gate.

King Ahab was greatly disturbed because his vassal guest, the king of Judah, seemed so little impressed by the sham battle staged expressly for his entertainment. For nearly an hour the open space inside the gate, cleared of market-booths, had rung with the clash of spear on shield and the dramatic groans of the supposedly wounded. From the housetops all about, the people of Samaria watched the spectacle with enthusiasm. They cheered their own side, the "Men of Israel," and yelled with fierce delight whenever a "Man of Syria" went down. And yet Jehoshaphat had not been moved to cry, as Ahab hoped he would, "Brother, let us go out to war against Syria together!"

Now King Ahab felt that he needed a war to keep his troops contented. They had had no exercise since the Great War three years ago when they had defeated thirty-three kings in one day, the king of Syria among them. Signs of restlessness in the army were becoming only too apparent. After much thought, Ahab had decided that it was his duty to march across the Jordan and recapture the city of Ramoth-Gilead, taken from Israel by Damascus a generation ago.

At last the king of Israel could stand the suspense no longer. He addressed his guest as "brother" again, for since their children had just been married, a war might be considered a family affair. "Brother, we really ought to get Ramoth-Gilead. Those Syrians have had it long enough. Would you care to join us?" To Ahab's huge relief the vassal king nodded gravely.

"I am one with you," said Jehoshaphat. "My men are one with your men, my horses with your horses." (Which meant, "My war-chariots with yours.") He checked Ahab's torrent of gratitude with an upraised hand. "But before we go any further, pray find out what our God has to say."

Ahab was completely taken aback. It simply hadn't occurred to him to do that. What did the old sober-sides mean, he thought resentfully, always dragging religion into business? He ran over the possibilities in his mind. Fortunately Elijah wasn't around any longer—he would be sure to be against the scheme. Then Ahab thought of his regular prophets, scores of them, even hundreds; all the professional ones who had begun to preach after Elijah had driven out the priests of Baal.* These men, of course, ate the king's bread and drank the king's wine; it was safe to guess what their advice would be. All but one—and Ahab's brows snapped together in a fierce frown. Still, what need to mention that one? He smiled, and spoke with diplomacy.

"Why, certainly!" Ahab summoned a captain. "Call the prophets together," he ordered, adding in an undertone, "Tell them what I told you about this war with Syria. And don't you dare let Micaiah get wind of this." The captain's knowing grin faded under the king's glare, and he sped off on the errand.

The prophets came in by droves till nearly four hundred of them had gathered at the scene of the mimic battle. In fact, all had been nearby, watching from the housetops with keenest relish. King Ahab saw that their vacant places on the roofs were quickly filled, as though people realized how exciting the next performance would be. It was, too. Four hundred prophets let themselves go.

* See the next chapter.

They danced and whirled and swung themselves about like dervishes. Presently they wheeled as one and bowed toward the waiting king.

"Shall I march?" demanded King Ahab impatiently. "Shall I march against Ramoth-Gilead?" The prophets responded in chorus.

> "March!" they chanted, "march, O king,
> God will deliver it to the king!"

Such agreement was truly inspiring. Greatly cheered, King Ahab relaxed on his throne till his visitor's cool query brought him bolt upright in alarm and chagrin. "Are these all the prophets you have?"

"Oh, there's another one," cried Ahab, so taken aback that the truth was fairly startled out of him. "But he's such a killjoy that I never send for him if I can help it."

The visitor's eyes flickered oddly. "I wouldn't feel that way about it." The tone was noncommittal, but Ahab was alarmed. Just what did the fellow mean? Was he hinting that he wouldn't join in the war till all the priests had been heard from? One couldn't risk that possibility, for it would waste so much time to go down and fight Judah into submission first. Ahab snapped his fingers toward an officer of his household.

"Go get Micaiah." The order was brusque and the messenger hustled off. King Ahab devoutly hoped that Micaiah would be given a friendly warning, but he could only too well imagine the bit of dialogue that would follow.

"I'd try to match the rest of the prophets this time, if I were you," the messenger might say. "Don't you know which side your bread's buttered on?"

"Whatever God tells me, that I will say!" Micaiah would probably retort. And when Micaiah came swinging into the king's presence with a long free stride, he looked as if he had just said something like that. King Ahab should have known better than to try wheedling.

"Now, then, Micaiah," the king began coaxingly, "tell me, shall we march to Ramoth-Gilead, or shall we give it up?"

Micaiah slid his stern lips into a pious smile, and spread his lean hands suavely—oh, the very picture of a proper prophet! He threw back his head and gave a perfect imitation of the chant which had just soothed the ears of Israel's king:

> "March away and win,
> God will deliver it into the hands of the king!"

It was such a delicious take-off that the housetops rocked with startled laughter. Even the grave visitor smiled, though the four hundred prophets bristled with disdain. King Ahab promptly lost his temper. "O tell the truth!" Just in time, Ahab remembered his religious guest. "How often do I have to tell you to speak the plain truth as from God?" he asked, in quite a different tone. Micaiah's brows darkened. In an instant the mantle of the tame preacher was thrown to the winds.

"I had a vision!" The passionate tones scorched all the laughter out of the assembly. "I saw all Israel scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and God said: 'They have no master. Let each of them go home in peace!'" At this plain picture of utter rout the crowds groaned, the soldiers started fiercely forward, and all the regular prophets lifted their voices in horrified protest.

"Oh, I told you so!" King Ahab started to lose his temper again, but he promptly remembered his much-needed ally. "But you'll go with us, won't you?" he urged the king of Judah. "All the others say we shall win. They must be right!" To his infinite relief, the grave king from the South nodded grave assent; after all, a vassal has small choice. Ahab's spirits bounded up again. He summoned the captain who had rounded up the obliging prophets. "Take this spoilsport away and clap him into prison on bread and water till I come home victorious!"

Cheers broke out. King Ahab rose, as a sign that the show was over. Even then Micaiah, though in the grasp of two soldiers, snatched the last word. "If ever you come home victorious," declared that lone rebel, "then God has not spoken by me!"

For the last time those two confronted each other, Micaiah and Ahab. On the king's side were ranged the four hundred dutiful prophets, the armies of Judah and the armies of Israel. On Micaiah's side, no one. Yet in the shifty eyes of that king, and the stern, deep-set eyes of the prophet, there rose the stuff that history is made of. No one who saw them was totally unprepared when the runners came wailing home with the news of the first battle:

"Before sunset, the cry ran through the camp, 'Back to your towns, back to your country, every man of you, for King Ahab is slain, is slain!' "

CHAPTER II

WAGES OF LIGHTNING

"Is IT really you, Elijah, at last?" The king's voice faltered and died away. Involuntarily he raised his hands in wonder. Strange hands for a king, thought the foreign boy who was with Elijah—fingernails broken and grimy, palms covered with dirt.

The major-domo of the palace followed the boy's glance, and grew voluble to cover his master's confusion. "We have been searching the length and breadth of Samaria," he said, "for water, for pasture for the royal horses."

The official's voice wilted away under Elijah's silent scorn. Even the foreign servant snickered. *The royal horses!* Why, everyone up north in Tyre and Sidon knew that here in Israel people were dying of thirst and famine, after three years of drought. What sort of king was this, to put the royal horses first?

Elijah brushed the chamberlain aside and confronted King Ahab. For long moments king and prophet faced each other in silence. Around the prophet's sheepskin tunic, his whole body was bronzed to a redder shade than the shaggy wool. His spare figure was straight, his lean face glowed with vitality, and in his deep-set eyes was a blazing fire. The king was caught at a disadvantage and knew it, the boy from Sidon thought shrewdly. His costly turban was awry, his robe of fashionable Tyrian dye was

crumpled and dirty from scrambling over the ground, and his face was marked with petulant anxiety. A flicker of fear was contradicted by a certain relief, though, plain to see. Was the long war between king and prophet coming to an end at last?

As the boy watched the two intently, it seemed to him as though Elijah was actually forcing pictures out of his mind into the king's, for King Ahab shrank back and grew more and more stricken with dread and shame. In fact all four of them, standing there on sun-baked ground not a mile from the king's palace, were vividly recalling how a land dies of thirst in three years without rain.

For three years ago, the four remembered, the usual fall rains had not come. Within the memory of the oldest men, this had happened once or twice. Everyone must carry water, they counselled, to drench the summer-dried ground so that the November seed might be sown. Though half the village cisterns were already dry, Samaria in those days was a land of rivulets. A rivulet can be dammed up, and women can walk farther and farther afield to bring more water home on their heads. Yet all the village women together could not bring water fast enough to soften land that dried up faster than they could moisten it. Still the old men cheered the villagers on. True, the spring and summer crops would be scanty, but soon would come the rains of spring.

Yet the spring rains failed, too. The cisterns were all baked dry, even the new-made pools began to fail. Many a village awoke to find that the nearest pool had shrunk underground during the night. The women sought wretchedly farther and farther afield for water, and the children trudged with them, carrying little jars on their

small heads all day long. The old men shook their heads. Next fall the rains would surely come, if one could keep alive till then!

And the fall rains of the second year failed, too. No one's grain bins now held enough for the winter, no one's vineyards bore more than a tithe of grapes, no one's oil-press was more than a quarter full. The old men and women died of weakness, the children began to die of hunger. But still the king's taxes went on! So much wheat must be collected in each district, so many jars of wine and oil. It was all for the king's palace, and the four hundred foreign priests of Baal who ate heartily at the king's table. Though Elijah's lad was from Sidon himself, he knew that this was not right. The priests should have gone back home to Tyre or Sidon where the famine was not so bad, instead of grabbing bread out of Hebrew children's mouths.

Elijah had said that all this would happen, just as it had. All four of them, standing there, knew that, for king and chamberlain had heard it with their own ears, and Elijah had told this lad who attended him. He had said, not once, but again and again, that the foreign Baal was no true God, with no power to bring forth corn and wine. King Ahab fairly read his thoughts again. "Baal" . . . the king began feebly, but his voice trailed off dead with the word that drew Elijah's lightning.

"Baal!" repeated Elijah in a tone that made even the boy jump. Another long silence followed, electric with Elijah's contemptuous thought of Baal. It flashed across without any words, somehow, what the boy had heard him say—Baal is no god at all. He is only a name for the greediness of men, greedy for wine, greedy for the meat

of bullocks sacrificed on his altar and eaten beside it afterwards. He only demands food from his worshippers, he never demands right living and justice. "Look around you," cried Elijah, "and see how powerless is this Baal. Yet for this foreign god of your foreign queen you have forsaken the Lord God Almighty."

King and chamberlain shriveled when Elijah paused, for somehow his silences stabbed deeper than his words. Yet he added one final challenge before he slipped away. "Come to Carmel! Bring your four hundred priests of Baal, and I will stand alone for the one true God. Let us see which will conquer. Have done with shilly-shallying. That one who conquers, let him alone henceforth be Israel's God!"

King Ahab hastened to give assent. Three years ago he had ordered the troublesome meddler out of the way. The meddler went—but see what had happened! Now at last the three-years' question would have to be answered: why not worship the god of corn and wine and the God of Abraham as well? So the king hastened back to his palace, and despatched swift runners all over his desolate little kingdom.

It was late afternoon on Mount Carmel three days later. The king and his four hundred priests, Elijah and his attendant were there, with every able-bodied man in Israel. High at the eastern end of that long range that marches in from the Mediterranean, there is a long level space with a sweep of upland beyond it. Here as on a stage lifted high in air, moved the scene of a national drama.

Never were spectators more tense. On a knoll above them was raised the king's royal seat, canopied with Tyrian scarlet against the blazing sun. Close around the brim of the

hill crowded the men of Israel. Bright-colored scarfs and turbans of festal attire formed a ghastly contrast to withered faces and eyes too large with famine. Off to the right stood Elijah, waiting, as though for the time being he were merely a spectator. Opposite him sat scores of sullen white-robed priests awaiting their turn at the altar of Baal.

Everyone there—king, prophet, priests and people—had been watching one single point all day long. It was the circle of stones around the altar of Baal. Here had been, and still was, tumult indescribable. A score of burly priests in blood-stained robes leaped about in their sacred dance, to the music of flute and pipe and lyre. The sun caught the golden disks of the sungod on their foreheads, set above sweating cheeks stained with dried blood. Wherever a white robe was flung open in the dance, ghastly wounds appeared, slashed in a man's thighs as part of his call to Baal. Around and around swung weary feet to the measure of a steady, monotonous chant: "Hear us, O Baal! Send fire, send fire!"

Every now and then the circle of dancers parted wide enough so that the gazing crowd could see the dead bullock on Baal's altar, untouched as yet by any fire from Baal. For that was the challenge that Elijah had set: "The god that answers by fire, let him be God!"

The shadow of Mount Carmel ran swiftly eastward down the plain below. At last the shadow of the king's seat reached across the altar, and the shadow of Baal rested on the heads of the weary people. Not till then did Elijah move forward in his shaggy desert garb. He gave the servant swift, incredible directions. His blazing eyes held the sullen priests at bay while his orders were carried out.

Quickly the boy brought forth from the undergrowth

twelve stones, one for each tribe of ancient Israel. As Elijah built these into a rude altar, he named each one for a son of Jacob. So he called the roll of those ancient desert clans, all of them once the pledged worshippers of God. "Reuben . . . Gad . . . Joseph . . . Benjamin" . . . every name went echoing here and there till it found some man's heart!

Though he had witnessed it, afterward the boy could never give anyone an idea of how swiftly the tremendous scene was over. Another bull was slain, the rude altar of God was drenched with water from Carmel's unfailing well to show that no trick was possible—and the incredible happened. Astounded king, cowering priests, wretched people—everyone there saw a great fork of flame that burst out of sunset skies to burn the flesh clean to the altar in clouds of hissing steam. They remembered it long after they had forgotten the storm that broke within the hour.

Was it Elijah's voice, or thunder? "How long halt ye between two opinions? If God be God, follow Him!—And as for these false priests, take them down by the brook and put them out of sight forever!"

The boy from Sidon was thrilled to the core by what he saw. On the far side of the ledge, the fat and cowardly priests tried to run, bleating for mercy, cursing their Baal now that he had cheated them of a meal and abandoned them. Opposite them stood Elijah, strong, silent, confident: the living answer to his own challenge for justice and a clean life. Down below the ledge, the men of Israel were crowding forward in dawning contempt for the queen's pampered weaklings, and dawning awe for Elijah. Question and answer snapped about like electricity.

"The priests served Baal for wine—is that what serving a god for wages does to a man?—Yea, look at them!"

"Does our God give the corn and wine after all?—Nay, whether He gives or withholds, we had best return to the God of our fathers!"

As for the boy himself, a new and tremendous thought came sweeping over his whole being, gathering up all his long hero-worship of Elijah into one fiery word:

"The God that answers by manhood, let Him be God!"

CHAPTER III

A THUNDERBOLT FROM THE SOUTH

THE roar of a desert lion broke through the air. The shepherd boy's ear caught it, and noted the direction before the last echo wavered up the hill. It came from the east, toward the wilderness where countless ravines cleave their way down to the Dead Sea. Amos sprang to his feet, thrust the remains of a barley loaf back into his girdle, swung his club to shoulder and raced down toward his sheep. They were starting up among the rocks where he had left them, nostrils quivering over the unmistakable sound. Amos sensed that one of the spring lambs was missing.

Amos was sure-footed as these mountain ewes, for he, too, was a Highlander, bred on these rocky hills of Tekoa. His sandals gripped the earth as fast as his bare brown legs could carry him, with never a slip or slide, though the stones came clattering after him. Would he be in time for rescue? Just then a wave of wind came sweeping up from the Dead Sea. Amos stopped, sniffed, and drew in the sickening answer with his breath—the faint smell of blood.

Why go further? A shepherd boy knew too well what he would find—nothing but blood-drenched grass, a bone or two, and scraps of bloody skin. The lion would scent him with the veering wind, and be off to his cave with the remains of the lamb that had ventured too far.

Amos dropped his club and stood poised for a moment.

Not to take breath, for what shepherd of Tekoa would be winded by a quarter of a mile run? He threw back the headdress that shaded his face and looked back up the hill toward his little flock. The rest were safe, the twenty sheep of the desert strain that his father had left him, but this was the first lamb destroyed since the flock had been his own. That remembered smell of blood troubled him.

That night it was Amos's turn to watch all night by the sheepfold, lest the lion or its mate, emboldened by such an easy kill, should come prowling farther up the slopes. Another shepherd slept across the entrance to the fold, but Amos chose his station by the north wall. There he sat alone all night long, wrapped close in his homespun cloak against the cold.

Swift fell the darkness of semi-tropical latitudes. When the stars came bursting out, Amos knew them by name as he knew his sheep. Best of all he loved Orion the hunter, the David of the sky. Indeed, what shepherd boy could sit where Amos sat, and not think of David? For he was stationed on the mountain ridge that is the spinal column of Palestine, running north and south. That dark bulk of towers on the northern horizon was David's beloved Jerusalem, only fifteen miles away. Over this watershed Saul had more than once chased the fugitive David. Down to the left, David had more than once sent the Philistines flying back to their Mediterranean Sea. All these tales of how an ancient highland chieftain won his kingdom were still told around every Hebrew campfire. Had it all happened nearly three centuries ago?

As the moon rose full, Amos followed the light across the wider landscape, tracing the scenes of stories that lay farther and farther away. Little by little a question took

shape in his mind as he saw how tiny Judah, David's Judah, lay completely ringed about with enemies.

Far to the northeast lay Assyria, treacherous and cruel as a lion, even now threatening conquest. The eastern mountains beyond the Jordan harbored Moab, enemy though kinsman. To the west the Philistines still dwelt, to the south the half-nomad tribes of Edom. How vengeful, how bloody they all were, not only to Judah but to each other! A just God, thought Amos—how could he permit the unending slaughter? Surely He could not endure it, surely He would punish them Himself! Amos's thoughts gathered thick and fast like winter storm-clouds about a thunderbolt. A message, he felt a message! Surely God had spoken to him. Tomorrow he would preach in Jerusalem—he, no son of a prophet, but an unlettered herdsman of Tekoa.

The next day Amos did indeed walk to Jerusalem to sell his wool, but he did not preach his sermon. What had burned so clear under the stars dissolved like a dream. He was no prophet, but a shepherd boy making his first trip alone to Jerusalem since his father died.

In the early dawn Amos took provision of sycamore figs and barley loaves and shouldered the heavy bags of wool. He went striding over the rocky hills at a shepherd's pace that would bring him north to Bethlehem before noon. Not far to the west lay the chariot road from Hebron behind him to Jerusalem ahead. But why should a shepherd boy need a road, when the towers of the Holy City pointed the way due north?

When Amos came striding home that night, he was not wearied with the thirty-mile walk, but he was puzzled and deeply angry. Why should the city merchants try to

cheat him? Trust a mountain boy to note their light stones to weigh the purchase and heavy ones for the sale! And a man from Bethel had been the most outrageous, though a sacred shrine was there. Amos could not understand it. His protests had only collected a crowd who jeered at the country lad in rough striped homespun. It was mid-afternoon before he found an honest dealer, and then it was a foreigner, a man from Tyre. Amos felt all the worse for that. Why, the Hebrews were God's chosen people; how then could they cheat each other?

As for Tyre, that city full of idols, why, Tyre was one of the cities that Amos had seen doomed to destruction, last night under the stars! Yet a Tyrian was the only one to deal justly with an inexperienced Hebrew boy. If just dealing was the very core of living, so the thought smote Amos, *then why should God spare the Hebrew and punish the Tyrian?*

Amos's tale was no news to the older shepherds of Tekoa. It was the season when they all went down to the warmer country to tend the ripening sycamore figs, and down there was more leisure and more chance to talk. Tale after tale they told him of how in the cities Hebrew starved and cheated Hebrew—it was all common knowledge.

"Your father knew," so the oldest shepherd, Jacob the son of Jacob, assured Amos. "I have heard him say that Jerusalem is a den of thieves and the priests of the temple a band of greedy hypocrites. As for Bethel, the shrine of King Jeroboam's country, that is even worse. I tell you there is no true religion left in the cities. Go and see for yourself, my son. Watch the cities the way you watch birds. Learn the snares—and keep out of them!"

Amos remembered these words the better for what happened to Jacob in the next rainy season. A bear came up from the Dead Sea region, prowling higher than usual, and struck him down. The widow went off to relatives in Jerusalem with her youngest son, Isaac, a boy of twelve. So the home was broken; but the old shepherd's warning never left Amos's mind.

Year after year Amos went northward to sell his wool, but no dealer ever tried to cheat him again. Something had hardened in his spirit, something that flashed like steel from his black eyes. Those eyes missed nothing at all, neither in Jerusalem nor in Bethel, ten miles farther north, for he sought an answer to his question—was there no true religion left in the cities? Always it was the contrasts that troubled Amos—riches a shepherd would scorn, but poverty such as the most frugal shepherd never dreamed of. One day a gaunt beggar boy snatched ravenously at Amos's food wallet—as though the country fare of poor figs and barley loaves were worth snatching for! A rich merchant's wife leaned from her litter to order her bearers to cuff the beggar boy out of the path. Amos judged her with the unrelenting desert standards. Fat, half-drunk with the wine of Samaria, pampered and cruel—Amos would have thrown her over the city walls for refuse! But to that half-starved boy he gave his whole portion of food.

A day came when one sight brought to a head all of Amos's long-gathering wrath. Business brought him to Bethel on a sacred festival day when every bazaar and lane was crowded with people. He had to elbow his way into the market square. On the upper side, as usual, court was being held. One glance that way, and Amos sprang forward through the press. There before the judges stood

a boy from Tekoa, shivering in the grasp of a burly merchant. The boy was Isaac the son of Jacob, that oldest shepherd who had known Amos's father. What was he doing here, clad only in the long shirt of the very poorest, his face lean with hunger?

Amos fairly tore out the story. He had known nothing of the family since Jacob's widow had gone to her kindred in Jerusalem. "What happened then, Isaac?" he demanded.

"They are like no kin of ours," Isaac told him bitterly. "My rich uncle is selling me to this man" . . .

"Nay, I but take the boy to work for me in pledge for debts," the merchant interrupted, wilting under the stranger's burning eye. "Money promised to the priests," he added, with a canny eye on the judges.

"Wine for the banquets!" struck in Isaac. A picture rose before Amos, the face of a fat and pampered woman whose breath reeked of the wine of Samaria. She—or one like her—to wreck the life of a boy like this! With one swift motion, Amos struck the merchant's hand off Isaac's shoulder and swung the boy behind him. He turned around just in time to catch the gleam of small coins passing from hand to hand.

"The boy belongs to the honorable merchant by just law," pronounced the oldest judge. "Stranger, stand aside!"

Stunned, Amos barely gathered force to stride away. Some impulse drove him up the hill to the sacred shrine itself, King Jeroboam's sanctuary. The nearer he came, the louder grew the din of feasting, dancing and high revelry. The smell of wine lay heavily on the air, and from beyond the sacred pillars floated another smell, faint but familiar: the blood of the lambs killed there to please the Lord God.

Some old barrier broke in Amos's mind and the wrath

of years rushed forth like a fountain. He began to cry aloud words that were shaped under the stars above Tekoa long ago.

"Curses upon Damascus!" he began. "God himself will punish her for torturing Gilead in war!" . . . He saw faces crowding together before him, flushed and startled, but quickly awake to a tune of disaster for their enemies. Someone started a tipsy cheer, and the crowd began to chant it.

"Woe upon them, may God curse them!"

"Curses on the Philistines!" Amos went on. "God will punish them" . . .

"Woe upon them! May God shatter them!"

"Curses on Assyria . . . Tyre . . . the Ammonites . . . all our enemies!" Still flowed the cry of doom, and still came the chant of approval.

"Woe upon them! May God curse them!" At last Amos gathered himself for a mighty effort. He saw the crowd lean toward him, panting with eagerness. Straight into their soft flesh he hurled a thunderbolt:

"And the Lord's curse on Israel!" The usual cheer, started from sheer force of rhythm, was quickly smothered in cries of "Hush, you fool, listen!"

"The Lord's curse on Israel," Amos drove on, "because you show no mercy to one another. You swill wine here at the shrine of God, you go out to sell the poor for the price of a pair of shoes. . . . For this, God will punish you. He will bring the power of Assyria down upon you. He will slaughter the house of Jeroboam, He will send you into far exile". . .

Eyes bred on the mountains see everything. Amos noted the man who rushed between the sacred pillars, and felt the hush that fell on the crowd. He looked up. There at

the top of the steps stood the high priest, Amaziah himself, gazing down in dignified silence.

The two farthest poles of the kingdom of Israel stood there face to face. The crowd recognized it, and slid back from them with little stifled gasps. Amos alone felt no awe of Amaziah. He saw a man old and stately, with handsome eyes and fresh color above a long white beard. The flowing robe, the imposing headdress of a high priest, at first sight seemed the fitting garb for an inner authority. But Amos, reading men as he read the stars and the hills, knew that here was a tree rotten at the very heart.

"Be off home to Judah," came a musical voice, long used to chanting. "Play the prophet in the country, but not here. This is the royal shrine and the nation's temple."

The crowd began to titter at the country prophet's expense, until Amos threw back his headdress and raised his relentless eyes. Then an uneasy hush fell. "I am no prophet," began Amos, "nor a prophet's son. The Lord took me from the flock and said to me, 'Go speak to my people Israel.' Listen then to the voice of God, who brought the Philistines out of Crete as surely as He brought you out of Egypt, who has a care for other nations as well as for you. I tell you that all Israel will be led off into exile. And you, false priest, shall surely die in a foreign land!"

Amos swung on his heel and was gone before the crowd got its breath. Behind him, he heard the hush burst into murmurs of protest, fear, scorn. He heard Amaziah's chant of reassurance, and then the shrill tones of a drinking song. It rang in his ears as he strode out of the gate into the highway.

A night under the stars—warm, slow days by sycamore trees—highway walks and a hundred bazaar tales of

Assyria the cruel—a starving boy and a fat woman in a litter—the clink of coin that made a shepherd boy a slave—all these echo through the Book of Amos. It was written down twenty-two centuries ago, but still the thunderbolts come leaping and crashing out of it:

"After crime on crime of Israel
I will not relent,
For they sell honest folk for money,
The needy for a pair of shoes . . .
So now I will deal with Israel, thus . . .
As a shepherd snatches from a lion's mouth
No more than two bones or the rag of an ear, . . .
So scarcely shall the Israelites be rescued . . .
Your sacred festivals? I hate them, scorn them;
No, let justice roll down like waters,
And righteousness as a mighty stream."

CHAPTER IV

A FATHER WHO LOVED LIKE GOD

Hosea gathered all his forces for the climax of his sermon. This Baal-worship, the worst sin of his people—how could he bring it home to them? Even Elijah had failed of any permanent result; how could he hope to succeed? He searched the faces of the usual bazaar crowd of Samaria, wondering wistfully how he could reach their conscience. Just then half a dozen priests in white robes came swaggering through. Levi, that great brute, snatched up a melon from old Joab's stall, offering no payment. That sight turned Hosea's natural gentleness inside out, and he broke out in fury.

"You wicked priests! You rob the people of the best they have—the wheat, the oil, the fruit, you take bribes, you commit murder on the way to the holy places—listen to me!" The priests were startled into a moment's attention. A few earnest faces in the crowd sought Hosea with a mute question. True, all these things were common knowledge, but who could break the power of the priests, backed up as they were by the king himself?

"You lead the people of God far astray," Hosea swept on passionately. "It is more your fault than theirs that they have forgotten the true God, and worship the Baals, the evil gods of the heathen who still dwell in our land. But

for all this, I tell you that the one true God of our fathers will punish Israel!"

Now Hosea was in danger of losing even the few sympathizers in his audience. Every man looked at his neighbor in wondering protest. Their thoughts were easy to read—what, not worship the Baals? How then should a man live? For these were the ancient gods of the land who gave the crops, without whose favor, so it was said, there would be no wheat and wine. Worship God, of course, but the Baals, too!—Hosea spoke as though he had been reading the thoughts of the crowd.

"I tell you, if you keep going after these other gods, God will cast off the nation of Israel. You will be no more his chosen people. Lo, I have named my daughter Nobody-loves-you, and my baby No-child-of-mine, to be a reminder all day long that God will disown Israel for her sins." Many a time before, Hosea had used his children's names for texts, but this time something unexpected happened. Someone in the crowd echoed the baby's name with a titter.

"No-child-of-mine?" called a woman. "Truly, no-child-of-yours. Look first to your own home, O prophet!" A flutter of a veil drawn close, and the speaker was lost in the crowd. But the damage was done, the spell was broken. Levi's voice rose in a heartless guffaw, the crowd took it up, and Hosea saw that he had lost his audience.

Hurt and bewildered by a taunt he could not understand, broken-hearted that his people would not listen to his plea for the one God, Hosea set off for home. Down through the tangle of lanes he went to his own doorway, one of many in a long wall of stone where a dozen houses crowded close together. He rested a moment on his doorpost and called the name of his oldest son. It was another sermon-

name, a reminder of that great battlefield of Jezreel on which the present king Jeroboam's ancestor had destroyed the wicked king Ahab's house. Just so, Hosea often said, God would destroy Israel in a second Jezreel.

"Battlefield!" Hosea called again. After a long pause, a sturdy boy of eight or nine ran out of the courtyard. He was limping. "Why, Battlefield," demanded his father after one look at the boy's knee, "where did you get that bruise? Why didn't your mother tend it for you?"

"Oh, mother's never at home," replied the boy, indifferently, "and grandmother's gone to market. Nobody-loves-you went off with mother a long time ago. Besides, she isn't any help, she's only five years old." Hosea forgot his weariness and marched the boy swiftly into the courtyard which they shared with other families. In no time he had opened a jar of olive oil, and bathed the hideous bruise with the rich soothing fluid. Then he looked wistfully about the deserted place. "Where's No-child-of-mine?" he asked.

Battlefield pointed across the courtyard. "Asleep over there behind the oven," he replied. "I'll go wake him." But a delighted gurgle announced that the sound of voices had done that. Out crawled Master Baby from behind the earthen cylinder, and pulled himself up by it. He started for his father on unsteady legs. Hosea ran to him just in time to prevent a tumble on the stones. Such a frail little fellow, thought Hosea anxiously, not walking as soon as he should. And was there not a certain untended look about him? He was an affectionate little chap, the most loving of the three children.

For a while the doom of Israel for Baal-worship was forgotten while Hosea was teaching the little child to walk.

Again and again he walked away, never too far, and held out his arms. Never once did he let the baby fall on the cobblestones.

Suddenly Battlefield gave a warning cry to his sister who had entered unnoticed. "Here, Nobody-loves-you," he called sharply, "don't do that now!" He moved swiftly in front of Hosea, but just too late. Hosea looked up in surprise, and saw something that froze him with horror.

On the other side of the courtyard, Nobody-loves-you was dancing a strange wild measure. Her little shoulders twisted about in frenzy, her childish brows were knotted in imitation of some passion beyond a child's understanding. From her lips came syllables that spoke plain as day to the horrified listener.

"An-i-ta-ta, Ashtoreth! An-i-ta-ta, Ashtoreth!"

Hosea recognized the phrase. It was part of an ancient hymn to Ishtar, the moon-goddess of the pagan countryside; worshipped at the Baal-shrines with secret and drunken dances where no decent woman should go. How had his little daughter even heard the devilish name? She was imitating someone she had seen in the pagan dance. But who could it be? Hosea had no more than framed the question when the terrible answer smote home to him. For there, entering swiftly behind the child, came his beautiful wife, Gomer. A certain sly and guilty look he had never seen before hardened to defiance before his look of horror.

"So you've found out at last, have you?" she sneered. "Then the game's up. I'm glad of it. I'll be glad to go. There's plenty of others who'll be glad to give me more than you ever have!"

A flash of ear-rings and circlets, the tinkle of glass

from forehead and arm-bands, the swirl of a blue embroidered robe—and Gomer was gone! Hosea was stunned by the suddenness of the revelation. He sank down on the stones, burying his face in his hands. For now he understood the sneer in the marketplace. It was Gomer who went to the Baal shrines. Her frequent absences from home, leaving his mother to do all the work, her neglect of the children, certain looks from the neighbors, Battlefield's warning to his sister—all these pointed to one dreadful fact. Everyone had known where his wife went, except her husband.

Hosea seized the baby and studied the face line by line—no, not one look of his own clan! He pushed No-child-of-mine away with a groan. The frightened baby began to cry. Hosea's mother, who had entered some moments ago, ran to the rescue.

"There, there, baby!" she soothed him. "As for her, Hosea," she cried angrily, "it's good riddance. She's a bad one. Now I suppose you'll divorce her, just as you said God would divorce Israel for Baal-worship". . . . Hosea raised stern eyes and his mother stopped short. She sent Battlefield off to the storeroom for a bundle of grass, and began silently mixing meal and water for bread.

When the boy returned, the grandmother took the grass and stuffed it into the oven used by all the families around that courtyard. At the crackling sound Hosea turned his head and stared into the fire. Fire—why, the religious history of Israel was traced in fire! Hosea began to see the things he thought about. First the burning bush, and Hosea crouched in awe before it, like Moses hearing the voice of God. Then he saw the lights that flashed in thunder from Sinai, and heard the call: "Thou shalt have

no other gods before me." Then followed Israel's return to Canaan, written in a trail of campfires across the desert. And all the way, pilgrim Israel worshipped one God only.

Once Canaan was reached, the fires grew sinister. There blazed the cruel flames in which the pagan Canaanites used to burn their first-born children to please their cruel gods. Then rose that unholy blaze by whose light the Baal-worship at the ancient pagan shrines went on. In that flickering light the dancers moved in and out among the trees, shameless in frenzy. Among them, the beautiful Gomer—even to imagine her there nearly drove Hosea mad.

It was a long time before Hosea wanted to preach again. Day after day he sat in the courtyard, hardly lifting his head. He was tender with the children, trying to be both father and mother to them, now that Gomer had gone away. The baby revelled in this new playmate who was always at hand. No-child-of-mine was the only one of the family who was happy.

One day Hosea broke his long silence. "Mother, I can never preach again. I spoke of doom and punishment, and lo, Israel goes unpunished, and the doom for Baal-worship rests on my own house."

"That Gomer, that wicked woman!" exclaimed his mother, voicing the resentment she had been silently cherishing all winter. "God will punish her for ruining your life."

Hosea sprang to his feet in a protest that surprised them both. "You shall not say so, mother. I love her, I love her! God cannot punish her without punishing me. God . . . why, if I feel that way about her, wicked though she is, surely God must pity" . . . He stopped short. The idea

was too new, too unheard of, to carry through. But he faced his mother in sudden decision. "I am going out to my fields," he cried, "I want to see the village where I first met Gomer and fell in love with her. Perhaps God will speak to me in the country." With the words he was gone.

Hard work awaited Hosea in his neglected fields. Deep in misery, he had let the fall sowing go undone. Now, though the fall and spring rains were over, his fields were unsown, his grapes unpruned and his olives untended. So all that summer Hosea stayed in his fields, and the children brought his food every day to the booth of wheat-stalks where he ate and slept.

Slowly something new awoke in Hosea, a sensitiveness that found religious meanings in everyday happenings. A neighbor's snare, full of struggling wild ducks—that gave Hosea a new thought of God's mercy. "Just so, poor Israel is caught in the snares of Ashtoreth and Baal," thought Hosea with a new pity. "Israel meant no harm, she truly thought that only the Baals could give her grain, only Ashtoreth make the fields fertile.—But surely, it is our God who gives the crops!" Hosea wondered at his own words, for no one had ever said just that before. "Poor silly Israel," he went on, "I am sorry for her.—Why then, God must be sorry for her, too!"

At last came a long-delayed barley harvest. Hosea was guiding his oxen over the mounds of grain heaped on the threshing floor. One of them was restive. Hosea lifted the yoke, found and eased a galled spot. "If I am sorry for the pain," the thought flashed over him, "why, just so, God must be sorry for Israel!"

As Hosea stood there by his oxen, the fragments of a

great discovery seemed suddenly to fall in place together in his mind. Of course God is sorry for Israel, because he loves her. More, the God who cares for wild ducks and galled oxen and wretched people is all there really is! Baals are nothing, images made by hands are nothing. And the Golden Calf at Bethel, held sacred by the whole nation, even that is worth nothing, for it has no power to love.

What strange thoughts! No one had ever said things like that before. Like the rest of Israel, Hosea had always accepted images and stones as helps to worship. As for the Golden Calf, that was no idol, that was a reminder of God's care in the old days of wandering toward Canaan. Even Amos had never raised any objection to that. The king worshipped in front of it, all men kissed it in the high ceremonies.

Where would such bold ideas as these lead? Hosea certainly had never dreamed of them when he began to condemn the Baal-worship. He felt like a national heretic; and yet he was perfectly sure that he was right. Suffering had made him more sensitive to the way God felt. Now he saw the Golden Calf as something that stood in the way of true worship. It side-tracked people, and so it actually helped that foul old forest worship to linger on, breaking up homes as his own had been broken. All this, Hosea saw at last, was breaking the heart of a God of love. Yet God, Hosea came to see, could not destroy Israel because He loved her, just as Hosea loved Gomer. God wanted a prophet who would go and woo Israel back to Him.

That night Hosea went home. On his way through the bazaar, he saw something almost beyond belief. A long look, an exchange of words with a dealer, and he rushed home to tell his mother.

"No, my son, not a slave!" His mother could hardly believe it either. "Not Gomer—for sale?"

"My wife stood by the auction-block," nodded Hosea, "but so worn and thin that no one offered to buy her. I will buy her and bring her back home."

His mother made no protest, but she looked mutely toward the nearly empty grain bins, not yet refilled. Hosea answered her look.

"The dealer will let me have her for a song. Fifteen shekels and six bushels of barley. There is enough."

His mother accepted the inevitable with good grace. "Then some day," she cried, "you will have a home again. Oh, my son, my son!" The children heard her cry of joy and came running out into the courtyard.

"Children, your mother is coming home," Hosea told them with shining eyes. "She has been sick a long time, and you must be very good to her."

Hosea strode off on his errand as if he walked on air. Words began to pour through his mind as this God of love took utter possession of him: and whether he meant his wife or his nation, who shall say:—

> "I will betroth her to me forever,
> Betroth her in a bond
> Of goodness and of justice,
> In kindness and in love;
> Yes, loyally will I betroth her,
> To let her understand the Eternal."

The pure joy of such thoughts made Hosea certain that he was on the right track at last. Tomorrow he would win the people of the marketplace to this God, their

Father. He went on, exulting, holding his children and his nation in one thought of love together:

"I will love those that had not obtained love; and I will say to them that were no children of mine, 'Thou art my people'; and they shall answer, 'Thou art my God!' "

CHAPTER V

THE MAN NOBODY HEARD

REMNANT clung on to his father's hand in terror when the king growled through his great black beard, "So that's your boy that you named for your sermon? The idea of giving him such a queer name as Remnant! So you really think the king of Samaria's going to capture Jerusalem, do you, and we'll all be killed except a remnant? Nonsense, I know how to prevent that!"

King Ahaz tossed an arrogant head above his gorgeous robes and frowned in a way that would have silenced most Hebrews. Isaiah was not at all afraid, Remnant saw with pride. All his life Remnant remembered that scene down by the reservoir, though to be sure he could not separate what he actually saw as a five-year-old from what his father the prophet had told him later on.

The little boy and his tall father had gone down the steep hillside of Mount Zion together. Everyone they met saluted Isaiah respectfully, but to Remnant's wonder, hurried on their way. At last the two came down to the reservoir, just inside the city wall. And there stood King Ahaz, shouting fierce orders to half a dozen bare-legged workmen.

"Strengthen that south wall, and be quick about it!" the king demanded roughly. "We've got to get a good water-supply if we're going to stand a siege. Mend that leak

before the king of Samaria's army gets here, or I'll have you flung over the wall!"

The king's face was red, and he was puffing as if the descent from his palace had winded him. Even a small boy could see that he was bullying the workmen because he was badly scared. He jumped at the slight scrape of their sandals on the rocky way. "Oh, it's you again," he growled. "So that's the boy that you named for your sermon." . . .

Remnant never did listen any more when father explained his name—he had heard the explanation so often! Not that he minded the queer name very much. Of course the other boys teased him about it, but Remnant could always retort that his father, Isaiah the prophet, was the best-known man in Jerusalem. He usually offered to preach the favorite sermon for them, too, for he knew it by heart. Father said that the people of Jerusalem were not doing right, as God wanted them to do, and so something dreadful was going to happen. However, a "remnant" would be sorry and turn to God, and He would save them. King Ahab hadn't really understood about that remnant. This is what they must do, as father said:

> "Listen to the Eternal's word . . .
> Cease to do wrong,
> Make justice all your aim,
> Let orphans have their rights,
> Scarlet your sins may be,
> But they can become white as snow,
> They may be red as crimson,
> And yet turn white as wool."

When Remnant began to listen once more, Isaiah was talking quietly to the angry king, as one reassures a

frightened child. "Our nation does surely deserve punishment for all her sins, as I have just told you, but it is not coming this time. God himself has sent me to tell you that this particular invasion from Samaria is nothing to be afraid of. Trust in God, for He will not let Jerusalem be captured."

King Ahaz simply didn't believe it. He flung angrily away and went puffing back up the hill to his palace. (For Solomon's temple was on the highest hill of Mount Zion, and the palace next below it.) "He didn't hear you, father," said Remnant, greatly puzzled. Isaiah only smiled.

"People don't like to hear you when you remind them that they're doing wrong, son. The king has no trust in God—he burns incense at all the old pagan shrines." Isaiah forgot the boy and went on thinking aloud. "It's only too plain what Ahaz will do. He'll call in the brutal Assyrian king to aid us against Samaria,—as if a lion would protect a lamb! He'll be terribly sorry for that some day. Yet even then, at the very last, God will save his holy city!"

Father certainly had guessed right about the king, Remnant often thought ruefully as the days went on. For King Ahaz did ask Assyria to help him against Samaria, and the results were terrible. Why, ever since then, Remnant had never had quite all he wanted to eat. The cowardly king had actually bought Assyria's help with the sacred gold vessels from the Temple. Assyria did indeed send an army to chase the enemy off, but after that the victors demanded tribute. So Ahaz raised the taxes to pay it, and food cost more and more, till the poor were half starved and even the rich felt the pinch. Isaiah had been wealthy, to be sure, but now he sent so many generous

portions out of his courtyard that Remnant, and his little brother Booty, never had any more second helpings.

Remnant had grown up and had boys of his own before the logical result of King Ahaz's foolish move burst on Jerusalem. Then once more it began to look as though Jerusalem would be the "spoil" of an invader—Assyria this time, just as Isaiah had said it would be. Remnant named his youngest son "Booty," just as his own little brother had been named long ago when Samaria was threatening invasion. Now Ahaz was dead. A gentler king had come to the throne, but he didn't listen to Isaiah so very much, either. Sometimes he was too timid and sometimes too bold. Now he made long arms to Egypt for help against Assyria, now he joined with other little states of Palestine. All the while, Isaiah kept patiently telling King Hezekiah to put his trust in God and not in this, that and the other one! And soon little Booty was old enough to wonder, as Remnant used to wonder, why people didn't listen to such good advice.

Booty loved his grandfather's poems. He used to go around chanting one of them because it was like a battle-song:

"God signals to a foreign power,
whistling for them from the ends of the earth;
swiftly they come, speedily,
none tired, none tripping,
not a belt slack,
not a shoe-string broken,
arrows sharpened,
bows all bent,
horses' hoofs as hard as flint,
chariot wheels like whirlwinds,

growling like a lion,
growling like young lions,
gripping their victim with a growl
bearing it off, with none to rescue!"

"That means the terrible army of Assyria coming on its way down to capture Jerusalem," Isaiah tried to explain to the little fellow. "But remember, it won't happen, if only Jerusalem will stop doing what is wrong, and put her trust in God." Booty just tossed his head, and ran off chanting the doom-song again because he liked the sound of it.

Suddenly the long foreseen storm came crashing all around Jerusalem just when nobody expected it! Sennacherib, the brutal king of Assyria, came raging through southern Judea. Forty-six walled cities went down before his battering rams. The whole wealth of the south country was driven off by his soldiers—horses and sheep and asses and camels. Terrible tales flew through Jerusalem.

"His soldiers have orders to give no quarter. His chariot-wheels are covered with scythes, and he loves to ride over a battlefield, up to the hubs in blood!"

Booty was proud to find that his father and grandfather were almost the only men in Jerusalem who were not afraid. The day came when Remnant took his youngest son by the hand, and once more followed Isaiah down to that never-forgotten spot by the reservoir. This time the whole population of Jerusalem came trembling after them —white-faced and haggard, quivering with hunger and fear. For today, across the deep ravine that might protect them a little while longer, stood Sennacherib's staff-commander with a detachment of Assyrian troops. Booty hid

his face in his father's robe, for the foreigners were huge and fierce-looking, and armed with clubs and spears.

The staff commander's snarling voice carried clear over the ravine up to the walls and housetops where the doomed people were shivering. Even Booty, much as he trusted his grandfather Isaiah, felt cold prickles running up and down his spine at that message.

"Listen to this word from the great monarch, the king of Assyria! He warns you that your king will never be able to save you. Nor can your god save you, for no god has ever saved his people from Assyria. Gods of Syria, gods of Damascus, gods of Samaria—where are they all now? Then why should you think your god can save Jerusalem?"

The sneering tones ceased. Booty peeked cautiously around. Perfect silence reigned on the housetops of Jerusalem. Everyone looked stricken with death, except for the few young men who had gathered near Isaiah. Booty saw that the Assyrians were puzzled, and no wonder. They had expected bluster, doubtless, and this silence made them vaguely uneasy. Booty was puzzled, too—why didn't somebody shout back?

"The king bade us return no answer," whispered his father.

"God sends the answer!" Isaiah suddenly cried aloud with shining, uplifted face. He turned his back on the scoffing Assyrians with a dignity that had something uncanny about it, as though he saw something nobody else could see. He held out his hands to Remnant and Booty, he nodded to the young men close by. "Come with me to the king," he said. "I am going up to the palace to tell him what God has told me." He spoke so clearly that every

Hebrew and every Assyrian could hear the incredible thing he had to say—words as of an unearthly vision.

"The king of Assyria shall never reach this town, never shoot an arrow at it, never appear in front of it, never throw up a mound against it; by the way he came he shall return . . . for I will defend this town, the Eternal declares, to rescue it, for my own sake and my servant David's sake."

To Booty's amazement, most of the people of Jerusalem simply didn't believe it. They broke into loud wails and ran shrieking to their homes, followed by shouts of Assyrian scorn. Only four or five of the young men went up with Isaiah to the palace of the king.

A day later, Booty ran into his courtyard shouting a bazaar rumor. "Grandfather was right!" he yelled. "The king of Assyria's army caught the Egyptian plague down in camp. So many of them died, Sennacherib's gone back home. He'll never come near Jerusalem. He's gone, he's gone!"

The family took the news too calmly to suit Booty. "It's true!" he insisted indignantly. "Can't you hear everybody yelling on the housetops? Come up on ours!" He tugged at Isaiah's robe, hurrying him up the narrow stairs. Once up, he looked at grandfather, and fell back with his mouth wide open. "Why, grandfather, aren't you glad?"

For Isaiah's face was sad and stern as he watched the wild revelry going on all over the flat housetops—drinking and dancing and general abandon. Stretching out his arms to a Jerusalem gone mad, Isaiah shouted,

> "Now why are you all swarming to your housetops,
> O shouting citizens, surging city,
> Merry-making? . . .

I would lament bitterly,
For my country is undone." . . .

Amazed cries rose from all within earshot. "Are you losing your mind?" shouted a neighbor. "Why, this is the deliverance you've been telling us about all these years!"

Booty was puzzled, too, till he followed grandfather's sad gaze up to the empty courtyard of the Temple. Not one soul, not even a priest, had gone up there to thank God who had delivered them from worse than death. The old man called his grandson to him and spoke gravely.

"Listen, Booty. Long ago, in that very Temple, God spoke to my heart. He told me to speak his thoughts to his people, but He warned me that most of them would never listen. All my life long it has been so. Never more than a remnant have listened to the word of God. And now there is not even one."

But Booty's quick ear caught the clack of sandals coming rapidly up the stairway. A black head appeared against the sky, then another and another, till half a dozen lads and young men had gathered there. They stretched out their hands toward the Temple. Isaiah's face was transfigured with joy as he welcomed them. A howl of derision arose on neighboring housetops, and scornful words came leaping across the alleys—"You fools, to leave the dancing!—Leave the old man and come back to the feast!—Young idiot, how dare you set up to be better than your father?"

Booty looked from one face to another. There stood three boys of fourteen, fifteen and seventeen, with young men in the early twenties. All of them had braved scorn to come, all of them had chosen their own way. There stood the aged Isaiah, his eyes calm, noble and steadfast under

his flowing silver locks. And all around them reveled a people gone mad! Booty made his choice, too. He ran to his grandfather and caught his hand.

Isaiah lifted his head. "Hope lies with the young men," he said, "and some day the right leader will arise to lead you on. Listen!" And he broke into his last great chant:

> "For unto us a Child is born,
> Unto us a Son is given;
> And the government shall be upon his shoulder;
> And his name shall be called Wonderful,
> Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
> Prince of Peace."

CHAPTER VI

NO KIN OF DAVID'S

MICAH was awakened at dawn by a confused murmur of voices in the lane. Instantly he snatched up a tunic, girded himself, caught up a homespun cloak and thrust his feet into a farmer's sturdy sandals. When he sprang out through his low doorway, he found half a dozen neighbors running down the narrow village way. One had heard wailing and had aroused the rest. Now they could all hear it—the wail of women. It seemed to come from the house of Ephraim's widow.

A little knot of the villagers of Moresheth-Gath had gathered there already. Ephraim's widow sat on her doorstone, uttering heart-broken wails. Around her stood the neighboring women, keening as for a death in the family.

"Can young David be dead?" was Micah's first thought. That was the sturdy son, named for the shepherd king of Israel. He was only fourteen, but well able to take his share of the field work: the only support of his mother.

One woman stopped wailing long enough to tell the story again. "David is gone!" she cried with wild gestures. "Before dawn they rushed in—Nathan's hirelings from Jerusalem. They meant not to arouse the village. They bound David and took him away. We shall never see him again. He will die as a slave!" At that hated word, the women broke into wails again, and the men into curses.

"But who is Nathan?" demanded Micah furiously. "How dared he steal the boy?"

"The rich lord in Jerusalem," a dozen voices answered. "Knew you not of Ephraim's debt, from the year when the harvest failed? She could not pay the interest. They have moved her landmarks, and they took David to be a bond-servant in Jerusalem."

Micah was stunned. He had heard vaguely of such doings, but he had not believed that anything like this could happen in his snug little village. And happen to David! Why, David had grown up with Micah's younger brothers, was like a younger brother himself. David, a slave, and his mother left without support! At the thought, Micah pushed his way through the wailing women and touched Ephraim's widow on the shoulder.

"Go home to my mother," he told her, speaking gruffly to conceal his emotion. "She will care for you." He turned on the men in sudden anger. "You that knew, why did none of you pay the interest? Or spring to rescue David this dawn? Does the blood of our clan run thin? Surely you were nô true kin of David's!"

At this, the worst insult that a villager could hear, groans arose through the little crowd.

"How could we pay?" demanded Isaac, and half a score of men nodded. "It's all very well for you to talk about paying other people's debts, when your father left you the best olive grove of the countryside and the barley fields in three valleys as well. But we haven't enough for our own families, these wicked days. Most of us have debts of our own. None knows when his turn may come to be thrust off the land of his fathers." The rest nodded sadly, and half a dozen heads bent in shame.

Startled to the core, Micah looked at his neighbors as though he were seeing them for the first time. Hollow cheeks and anxious eyes were many. Why, many of them looked actually hungry! Why had he never noticed it before?

"Talk with the laborers who are reaping your barley!" a scornful voice struck in. "Every one of them used to own his own farm. They can tell you a tale, and it's time you knew it!"

All through the group, Micah caught a glint of malicious satisfaction that he, the only well-to-do farmer in the village, should realize at last that he stood practically alone. A tumult of thoughts rushed over him like a torrent down from the hills in the rainy season. He rushed out of the crowd and down through the narrow streets to the market. The booths were not up yet, but the gate in the town wall stood open.

"You're too late," shrilled the aged gatekeeper. "Nathan's men were off over the hills half an hour ago. And there's half a dozen caves they could hide the boy in, even if the whole village started after them. Besides, there's a dozen of them, all armed with spears and clubs." Micah was pushing by unheeding when the gatekeeper called again.

"They say Samaria can't last long." Micah stopped in his tracks.

"What news of Samaria?"

"Oh, the Assyrian catapults have broken down half the walls, and the people are starving," gloated the gateman. "Serve them right for making long arms to Egypt against the king of Assyria. They shouldn't have gone outside of their own kin for help."

Micah had a sudden, desolating flash of insight. "The

conqueror's almost in Samaria? Then it will be our turn next!" The gatekeeper gave a shrill cackle of derision.

"What nonsense! We're all God-fearing folk down here in the villages of Judah. City folks are a bad lot. Samaria's worst of all, swilling their wine and petting their idols. They deserve all they get.—What's the matter with you?"

For Micah had groaned, remembering David. He spoke with a sudden, dreadful conviction, saying something that had never crossed his mind in all his life before. "Judah," he cried, "why, Judah is just as wicked as Samaria!"

After one startled moment the gatekeeper's contemptuous laugh broke out again. But Micah had fled out of the gate and down the long valley that leads westward toward the Mediterranean sea. He had to be alone to think out this double shock.

Hours later, Micah was still sitting on the crest of his favorite hill. The well-loved view supplied the setting for the drama that was boiling within him. In front stretched the last low hills of southern Judah, rolling, amid many valleys, to the great shore plain. At one spot on the horizon gleamed the blue Mediterranean, not twenty-five miles away. Between lay many little white-walled towns. The nearer ones were Judean, but toward the sea dwelt those ancient enemies, the Philistines. Back and forth across that little strip of shore passed the armies of the great empires, Egypt and Babylonia, ever crossing that narrow bridge to spring at each other's throats. Down that very road, three years ago, the foolish king of Samaria had sent an embassy to Egypt to ask for help against Assyria. And now Egypt, as usual, was proving a broken reed.

At first Micah's mind was too boiling full for steady thinking. He could only utter cries for vengeance, of

hatred for injustice, of pity for David. At last he sat exhausted. Only then, a strange new kind of picture began to grow deep in his mind. There were really three pictures, but they all melted into one in this strange kind of half-dream. God himself was coming to earth—the king of Assyria was coming to destroy Judah—both to punish a nation that had shown itself no kin of David's and other boys like him!

God's coming was like an earthquake. Micah almost felt the rocks melting around him, the hills caving in, the ravines flooded with hidden waters. And now came Assyria, marching. . . . Far off by the sea, Micah seemed to catch a myriad tiny glints of light, as of the sun glancing on helmets and spears. As he watched, the points of light turned inland and came sparkling up the valleys. Wherever the tiny stars touched a town, the houses caught fire and went up in clouds of smoke. Nearer and nearer came that visioned destruction, sweeping over village after village that Micah loved. Even closer it came, sweeping up the long defiles toward Jerusalem. So Jerusalem must fall before the invader too! Micah was sure of it by the ache in his heart.

But why? And now the third picture grew more distinct than the others—David! David, clubbed onward by his captors; David, carried exhausted into Jerusalem; David beaten day after day by an overseer in alien fields. And all because the rich lord in Jerusalem had proved himself no true kin. Micah felt sure that at last he understood the ways of God. For David's sake, and others like him, the Lord God Almighty would come down from heaven! For David's sake he would send the pitiless Assyrian to punish

the nation who had forgotten that, under God, they were one holy clan.

A week later Micah strode through the west gate of Jerusalem. He had sold his best field and come to redeem David. Meanwhile Samaria had fallen. Every bazaar in Jerusalem rocked with the news. Her great walls were broken and tumbled down her hillsides. Twenty-seven thousand of her people were marching over the desert into exile eight hundred miles away. What astounded Micah was that nobody took the disaster as a personal warning. Everyone said, "Serve them right, the idol-worshippers!" No one cried, "Our turn next!"

Puzzled and grieved, Micah sought out an acquaintance to learn how he should go about it to get David back.

"It won't be easy to get him out of Nathan's clutches," he was told bluntly. "You must grease the palm of the fat judge well or he will give judgment for Nathan. Then give Nathan's steward a dozen shekels, and as many more to his overseer. Then pay the price, and David should be free."

"What!" Micah cried indignantly. "More than half the price of my best field for bribery! I shall not have enough left to redeem David. It is robbery!" Micah shouted so loud that the bazaar groups turned to look at him. Then Micah was moved to tell them what he had learned about God. He spoke with strength and skill and courage, rehearsing the story of eviction and kidnapping, with other crimes against justice that had but just come to his knowledge. He told them that God would punish them with a fate like Samaria's; that within their lifetime they would see captors dividing their ancestral fields.

"Stop it!" cried an indignant voice. "Such harping is

not prophecy. Nothing bad can happen to the house of Jacob!"

"Leaders of Jacob, listen to this!" Micah's voice rang full and solemn in words that were remembered for many a generation:

> "You who build up your Zion with bloodshed,
> And Jerusalem on crime, . . .
> Therefore on your account
> Shall Zion be ploughed up like a field,
> Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,
> The temple-hill a mere wooded height."

Some of the listeners were impressed in spite of themselves. "What shall we do to please God?" someone cried, and Micah answered him:

> "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good,
> For what doth the Lord require of thee,
> But to do justly, and to love mercy,
> And to walk humbly with thy God?"

At last Micah turned and strode out of the gate of the city that paid very little attention to his cry for justice. As he walked on, he planned what to do next. He would sell part of his ancestral olive grove, for David must be ransomed. Surely, a boy who bore the name of Judah's greatest king would grow up to be a leader of his blinded people!

"For the village ways are best," Micah told himself with conviction. "Not Jerusalem, but Bethlehem, is favored of God." For the nearest village on his way was tiny Bethlehem, home of the beloved David who lived three hundred years ago. Over the darkening hills, Micah sent a thought toward it.

"O Bethlehem,
Tiniest of all townships in Judah,
Out of you a king shall come,
One whose origin is old,
Of long descent,
One who stands firm and rules
With high authority from his God
the Eternal."

With a great sigh Micah strode soberly on, grieved that he must tell David's mother why he had come home, this time, without her only son.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST STRONGHOLD

"In the king's name!" The din of the bazaars of Anathoth ceased suddenly at the herald's cry.

"It is the men of the Book from Jerusalem!" The word went flying up the lanes, and people came running out of all the little stone houses to crowd about the king's soldiers. For a month, disquieting rumors had been on the wing from Jerusalem. The king had found a Book of the Laws of God—it outlawed all the ancient village shrines —what would the king do? The women showed fear, but the men glowered sullenly at the soldiers, armed with spears and hammers. One lean young villager, standing back by the woolbooth, regarded the messengers with peculiar eagerness. His name was Jeremiah.

"Hear, ye people!" The herald's voice rang sharply as though he expected opposition. "Here is the code, which the Eternal your God has directed that you are to be taught to follow. From this time forth you must obey it.—Baruch, stand forth and read the Law!"

A young man dressed in foreign-dyed wool like a noble unrolled his sheepskin case, and began amid an uneasy hush: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One. . . . You must never follow any other gods belonging to the nations round you . . . lest the anger of the Eternal

blaze out against you and wipe you off the face of the earth."

There was an ominous pause in which more than one soldier gripped his spear, for every face was hostile except Jeremiah's. The young scribe went on:

"You shall destroy all the spots at which the nations whom you dispossess worshipped their gods, on high mountains, on hills, and under any leafy tree; you must demolish their altars, break their obelisks, burn up their sacred poles." . . .

"Never!" Shouts and shrieks rent the air with such a din that Baruch could not be heard. The king's commission shrugged their shoulders—they had heard the like in every half-pagan village so far. Finally the uproar narrowed to a cry. "We will keep our ancient shrine. We have a priest descended from Eli, who was priest in Israel a hundred years before your temple at Jerusalem was built. Let him speak for us."

An old man was pushed forward, but the herald would not let him speak. "Venerable father, we know you," he said courteously. "You and your family have doubtless worshipped the one true God of Israel at the local shrine, but your people have worshipped the old evil gods of the land. Therefore we go to destroy it.—In the king's name!" The king's soldiers swung about and clashed out of the gate and up the nearest hill to the open-air shrine. The whole village followed, screaming useless curses. The young man Jeremiah ran ahead of the crowd and gained a place near the king's herald.

When the great stone pillar to the right of the altar came crashing down, the soldiers sprang on it and broke it to pieces with their hammers. Even when the stones of the

ancient altar were beaten apart, the clang of their hammers drowned the cries of protest. But when they cut down the wooden pillar to the left, and set fire to it, then the women's wails could have been heard in Anathoth. For this was the mother-goddess to whom women came to pray that they might have children.

A burly man broke out of the crowd. "The king has destroyed the home of our God!" he shouted. "We worshipped God here, and no idol." A dozen voices were quick to echo him. Riot and mutiny were in the air.

"My brother, you lie!" Jeremiah's passionate tones rang loudly. "Well you know that the stone pillar stood for the ancient Baal of this spot, and the wooden pillar for his wife. Well you know what wicked, heathen dances you have held here in their honor. You have done to this very day what the prophet Hosea condemned." The watchful herald swung Jeremiah aside just as a fragment of stone flew to his head.

"Take that, traitor!" Jeremiah's own brother had flung the stone and led the cry. "You defy the priest, your father, do you? You side with the rich lords at Jerusalem against your own kin?" Another stone rang harmless on the shattered altar, but the soldiers chased the mutineers down the hill. The herald turned to Jeremiah and spoke warmly.

"We've heard of you. You've been preaching like Hosea against this Baal-worship. Why not come with the king's commission and preach with us?"

Jeremiah was silent for a long while, but his thoughts were written on his face. Leave his home?—a little stone village perched on the last shelf above broken desert hills that tumbled far down into the Jordan valley. Such a poor town, where the farmer must fight for every inch of

terraced ground, and the lean herds often strayed down into the wilderness where the lions accounted for them. A barren town, but his only home, and yet, filled now with his enemies.

At last Jeremiah turned to the herald. With the last whiff of smoke from the charred pillar in his nostrils, he answered sadly, "I will come with you."

Jeremiah never came home to live again. When he came back from preaching the king's reformation through the villages of Judah, a frightened girl met and warned him.

"Do not go home," she whispered. "They plan to kill you." She hid her face under Jeremiah's searching look. His face was a study of grief, despair and longing. He answered her hopes as well as her words,

"I must never marry," he spoke sadly, "for evil days are coming, because of the evil ways of Israel. . . .

"I hear the blare of trumpets,
And the battle-cry.
Crash upon crash!
The whole country is down,
Our tents are laid low in a second . . .
My people are senseless,
They care not for the Eternal;
They know how to do wrong,
But they have no mind to do right."

The girl shivered, for every villager knew of the "terror on every side"—nations crouched all around them like lions waiting to spring—the terror from Egypt—from the wild northern tribes—always the terror from Babylon.

"But the great Isaiah promised us safety in Jerusalem," she began doubtfully. "Surely, we are the chosen people?"

Jeremiah gave her one heartbroken look. Then he turned away, and slipped out into the twilight.

Jeremiah found refuge in the poorest quarter of Jerusalem and lived there quietly for fifteen years. All this time he was growing more and more unhappy, for he found out that the glorious new Book of the Law was not really making the people really good. To be sure, under this religious king, the services in Solomon's Temple were regular and magnificent. Now that the country people were required to come in for the monthly feasts, the crowds had hardly standing room. And at every service a priest read from the Book of Law, till no Hebrew could fail to know the Ten Commandments by heart. Yet every day in lane and marketplace, Jeremiah would see every one of the Ten Commandments broken! Something, he knew not what, told him to hold his peace a little longer.

All too soon the good king died, the new king upheld the Temple services but he cared nothing for the reforms, and the old pagan ways came creeping back again in secret. But all the time people kept on counting on the Book and the Temple to save them from outside attack, because they were the chosen people of God! Finally Jeremiah could keep still no longer. He marched up to the Temple to make the protest he had held in so long.

"Listen!" he cried, "here is what the Lord of Hosts has to say! . . . Amend your life and doings, that I may dwell among you in the Temple here. Do not rely on false phrases like 'This is the Eternal's very own Temple!'" The ten commandments of the sacred Book of the Law flashed through Jeremiah's mind, with what he had seen the people make of them in everyday life.

"What!" The torrent of words burst forth again. "You

steal, murder, commit adultery, perjure yourselves, sacrifice to Baal—and then come and present yourselves to me in this house, thinking you are now quite safe? I will destroy this house on which you rest your confidence, and I will fling you out of my sight!"

One moment of stunned silence, and then what an uproar broke loose! It was a hundred times worse than the din that greeted the king's commission at Anathoth, and now Jeremiah was the center of it. Furious yells rose all about him. "He dares to speak against the sacred Temple! —He dares to contradict the great prophet Isaiah!—Death to him, he has spoken against the sacred Book!" Tumult raged so high that the authorities heard it and came rushing up to see what the matter was. A heresy trial followed in dead earnest.

"This fellow deserves to die!" the furious cry rose again. "He has been speaking against the sacred city!" Jeremiah was the only man unmoved. He spoke quietly.

"As for me, I am in your power; do with me as you think right and good. Only, if you put me to death, you bring the guilt of innocent blood upon yourselves, for the Eternal sent me to say this in your hearing."

"What need have we of a prophet? We have the Book!"

A sheik from the south country struck in, shouting to make himself heard. "It is no crime to speak against the sacred city, for the prophet Micah did that, a man of my region. Listen!" And he quoted what Micah had said a hundred years ago: "You build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. . . . Therefore shall Zion be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the temple-hill a mere wooded height."

The bottom dropped out of the opposition, the author-

ities acquitted Jeremiah for very shame, but the mob, cheated of its prey, was all the more furious. They would have lynched Jeremiah if a friend had not spirited him away. After that it was never safe for Jeremiah to enter the Temple or even, for a while, to preach. He had been thrust up into the rank of the prophets to whom the people would not listen. So one day he sent for Baruch to come with his writing materials, and after that Baruch came every day.

At last, in the dead of winter, terrible news reached Jerusalem and threw the city into panic. Their long-dreaded enemy, Babylon, was getting into action at last. The great Nebuchadnezzar was planning a campaign to punish first Egypt, then Jerusalem. He was coming "in the spring," as a tale of that time has it, "when kings go out to war." A solemn fast was proclaimed in the Temple, and the whole town went up to wail and pray. Baruch went, too, with a parchment scroll just completed, fastened in a new sheepskin case.

Late that afternoon Baruch came back, white-faced and trembling, with an empty case. He had read the scroll first to a king's officer, then to the princes, who sent it to the king himself. "They feared the king's wrath, and hid me in the Temple," reported Baruch, "but I had the story from the man who read your words to the king."

In that cold January the king sat in the winter room of his palace, warming his hands before a charcoal brazier. How he laughed when he was told of the scroll! "Oho!" It was an unpleasant, sneering laugh. "So Jeremiah has written a book? The very man who said that the people couldn't be made good by reading a book. So he can do better than the Law, can he?" The king fixed hawk eyes,

suddenly cruel, on the startled messenger. "Read it!" he snapped.

"And he read first what you wrote about the wicked king himself," said Baruch. "I remember it—listen." He repeated with the fluent memory of a race still unused to books. The hot words fairly stung the air of the cold little room:

" 'Listen, O House of David, govern diligently and justly, rescue the victims of oppression, lest my fury blaze up like fire at your evil doings, and burn with none to quench it.' "

The king laughed with dangerous softness. "Burn with none to quench it?" he repeated. Suddenly he snatched the scroll from the messenger's hands. He slashed off the first column with his penknife and fed the charcoal fire with it. The blaze shot up, the smell of burning parchment filled the room. Then he signed the messenger to read on.

"So then the man read what you wrote to the people of Judah," Baruch took up the tale. "I remember that, too:

" 'For the men of Judah have defiled the house that belongs to me,' says the Eternal, 'by putting their detestable idols inside it, and they have erected shrines in the valley for burning their sons and daughters, a thing that I never ordered, a thing that never entered my mind. . . . Therefore I will silence in the towns of Judah the sound of mirth and joy, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, and the land shall lie waste . . . And wherever I scatter the survivors of this evil race, they shall prefer death to life,' says the Lord of Hosts."

The king snatched the roll again. Baruch could not go on. Jeremiah nodded. He could see it all—the evil-eyed king, gorgeously robed, safe and warm in his cedar-panelled room; and the word of God sending up a deathless flame

out of the tiny brazier that warmed him. And the trembling messenger, reading on and on. . . .

"He read what you wrote about all the people being dragged into exile, after Death climbed in at their windows," whispered Baruch, choking on the words. Jeremiah finished the tale for him.

"So the king fed the flames that warmed him, till the roll was all consumed? His face grew red with the heat of it."

Baruch nodded mutely. Jeremiah was silent so long that the one ray of sunlight worked its way out of the room. At last, in the dusk, Baruch broke the silence.

"Master, is it worth it?" he cried. "You are driven from home, driven out of the Temple, the palace, perhaps even from Jerusalem!"

Jeremiah rebuked him sharply. "God says, 'Never expect smooth fortunes for yourself!' "—More gently, he went on, "Long ago, when I was a boy, God warned me that the life of one who speaks for him would be like this. He told me: 'I fortify you this day like a town, a bronze wall, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, the priests and the laity; they shall attack you, but they shall not overcome you.' " Baruch gazed in awe at this lonely leader who all his life had stood like a bronze tower, alone, but impregnable.

Jeremiah went on thinking aloud. "There is no safety in a Book," he mused. "There is no safety in the Temple. There is no safety except" . . . Jeremiah sprang up, lean and sinewy as an Arab for all his years. "Take out your writing materials!" he ordered, and the astounded Baruch reached in his girdle. "We will write the book again,"

Jeremiah swept on, exulting. "But first, I have a new message from the Lord of Hosts. Write this:

'And I will put my law in their inward parts,
And write it in their hearts,
And I will be their God,
And they shall be my people.
And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor,
And every man his brother,
Saying, Know the Lord,
For they shall all know me,
From the least unto the greatest.'"

Baruch took a long breath, and set to work with a strange new look on his face. He knew that Jeremiah had found the last stronghold for the words of God—not a book, nor a temple, but the heart of the common man.

CHAPTER VIII

A STOKER OF HOME FIRES

The lean young Jew in the plain mantle bent over his curious task. As he sat in his low doorway he was scratching an outline in the unbaked clay of a big square tile. Around him a dozen sad-eyed men sat listless, with a boy or two peeping over his father's shoulder. Suddenly a lad of eleven or twelve called out, "It's Jerusalem! Look, he's drawing Jerusalem!"

The group was shocked broad awake by Jonathan's cry. They crowded so close about Ezekiel that he could hardly free his arm to go on drawing. Soon the boy's father shook his head, however, and sank back into his usual quietness.

"Nonsense, Jonathan," he said dully. "How could you know? You were only six years old when God forsook us and thrust us off here into exile in Babylon." The rest nodded and swayed as though the tale rehearsed so often had set their very movements into a pattern of woe. The exile, the exile! What else had they had to think about for the last six years? Ezekiel silently went on with his drawing. Jonathan persisted.

"But you've told me so often, father. See!" The boy held out his left hand with the thumb bent underneath. "The hills of Jerusalem are like this, with my fingers divided two by two. That's the ravine between them. In front, beyond my fingers, are the deep ravines that protect

the city. This way, up my wrist, lies the north caravan trail where we walked to Babylon. Look, the Temple stood on the second knuckle of my little finger. That's what he's drawing now. Now he's drawing the wall around the whole city" . . .

Jonathan's eager voice was drowned in sudden cries as the others at last saw what he saw. They were all speaking at once. "Jerusalem—the holy city—nay, holy no longer, God has forsaken it—*news?* Have you news of the siege of Jerusalem today?"

A Babylonian soldier, clashing through the Jewish colony on his way to the business quarter of Nippur, stopped short. "Up to some mischief," he concluded. "Those Hebrews never look half alive unless they're plotting about Jerusalem. If I were Nebuchadnezzar, I'd throw them all into the Grand Canal!" He edged back around a corner within earshot. The moment afterward Ezekiel raised his head.

"Jerusalem will be captured," he declared with conviction. "Never fool yourselves about that. The siege mounds are up, here and here and here, and the battering-rams will follow. The inhabitants will be starved into surrender. Once the walls are shattered, the captives will join us in exile. I tell you plainly, give up all hope of getting back to Jerusalem. Your lot is here. What you must do"— Cries of rage drowned him out. He had driven a thorn clean into their most sensitive spot. What, Jerusalem captured?— "Jerusalem cannot be taken," cried one, "the great Isaiah has said so. It is the city of God!"—"Of course we shall go back! What else is there to live for?"—"I have money," broke in a third, "I will send food to Jerusalem. I know a way to get it in."

It was Jonathan's father who made that rash remark. Two men, robed in finer wool than the rest, nodded agreement. Another only shrugged his shoulders and toyed with the engraved Babylonian seal that hung from his wrist, ready to stamp an agreement. The soldier peered keenly around his corner before he darted away. He had hardly left when the sudden flare died down and the group fell back into its misery once more. Ezekiel watched them with keen anxiety, as though he wondered if he could ever make any impression. Now he joined them in silence. All of them were seeing again the same wretched pictures of their deportation six years ago, even boys like Jonathan who had been told what they did not remember.

The soldiers of Nebuchadnezzar battering at the gates of Jerusalem. . . . The fatal roll call of the leaders of the city, told off for exiles as a warning to the rest. . . . Farewells to relatives left behind, cut short by the frantic rush to sell property for provisions on the journey. . . . The beginning of that three months' march north and east over the caravan route to Babylon. . . . Taunts and jeers from their captors, occasionally the lash for a man who resisted. . . . Weariness by day, exhaustion by nightfall. . . . Worse than all these, the sudden homesick terror that crushed them down from the moment when someone gasped, "Why, we can't even pray any more! *We've left God behind!*"

It was this incurable homesickness for their Temple that had bound most of the exiles like walkers in a dream ever since. Herded past the high walls of Babylon, set full of towers like teeth, they scarcely saw them. Sent down the Grand Canal to Nippur, they had settled down to farm the land assigned by the king, with government rations of

wheat and oil till the first crops come due. They should have felt at home, for the seasons were nearly the same, only in the dry season there was always plenty of water for irrigation in the Grand Canal. Farming was easy, and the blades of wheat were broad and tall. But how should mountain-bred men feel at home on this endless dusty plain with no hills higher than the mounds of some long-ruined city, or the steep banks of scores of canals? Far from being grateful for the certainty of water, they hated the endless creak of the water-wheels.

That gnawing certainty never left the Hebrew exiles: they had left God behind. How could a Jew ever feel at home without God? And God's hearth-fires, he knew, were lit in Jerusalem.

At this point in their memories, everyone drew a long breath, and covered his lips like a mourner for the dead. These men who came to listen to Ezekiel every Sabbath were the heads of their little communities within the colony. What they felt, everyone felt. Ezekiel picked up his tile once more. Swiftly he effaced the walls of Jerusalem, broke the tile and threw it away. He spoke with a sudden power of conviction.

"I tell you, God is here!" cried Ezekiel. "Here in Babylon, here by the banks of the Grand Canal, I have seen his chariot-wheels!" Jonathan leaned forward with shining eyes. Most of the men heard the words but did not appear to believe them. Only the man who had shrugged away the idea of sending food to the besieged jumped nervously. Ezekiel shot a meaning glance toward that costly Babylonian seal, engraved with an eagle-headed god.

"You hope not," he said quietly. "It would interfere

with your business if you dared not swear by the gods of Babylon!"

Levi broke into a torrent of accusation to cover his confusion. "God has not dealt fairly with us!" he stormed. "My clan had done nothing against him, that we should be punished with exile. It is all the fault of our wicked king Manasseh, and our wicked forefathers. We are all punished for their fault." Most of the listeners nodded. "It is not fair—who would serve a God like that?" The audience was with Levi. He had sounded a note to which everyone vibrated, and the air rang with cries of assent.

"God is not like that," cried Ezekiel when he could make himself heard. "God meets us man by man, not clan by clan. If your father worshipped God truly, that will not save you from punishment, Levi, if you forsake Him. But if you do forsake Him, your sin will not be visited on your son Jacob here, if only he remains true to God. You alone will be punished." Jacob nudged his father, who squirmed as at a home thrust, rose, and stalked out. Others rose more slowly and slipped past Ezekiel with brief, sad greetings. Only Jonathan flashed him a warm, understanding smile.

Sabbath afternoon meetings like this one continued regularly, though some of the elders dropped out and others like Levi kept on coming but grew more and more silent. At the next meeting Jonathan's father was missing, for word had been carried to the king of his rash threat to aid besieged Jerusalem. He and half the men of his street had been drafted to Babylon in a slave gang to rebuild the wall of Marduk's Temple, washed down in the last rainy season. He never came home again. As for Levi, he came once in a while but sat sullenly silent. Always Ezekiel said

the same things as the years went on,—that God is here, and God judges a man by himself alone. Some listened eagerly, but more came for the chance of talking about their lost Jerusalem.

So it went on, till Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnezzar's forces, and sacked at last. Eleven years after those first few exiles came, another panic-stricken host, worn down with hunger and the long crash of battering-rams, trudged the three-months' trail to Babylon. A few joined the earlier colonies, others were scattered here and there throughout Babylonia.

The day the news of the destruction of the Temple reached Nippur, Levi went out and bought a costly alabaster vase. When Jacob saw it, he caught his father's arm with an anxious query. "You aren't taking it to the temple to offer it to the god of war?"

"Of course I am!" his father blustered. "Bel must be stronger than the Hebrew God, or how else could Jerusalem have been taken? After this, I serve Bel. You'd better, too. And you'd better stop sending your boys to Ezekiel for religious instruction. What's the use of their learning about a religion that's failed?" Jacob shook his head and turned away. When next the council of elders met in Ezekiel's house, other places besides Levi's were vacant.

Twenty years after Ezekiel had drawn that first sketch of Jerusalem, he drew another for the same group. All this time the Sabbath meetings had been going on in his house, but since the fall of Jerusalem the elders listened more respectfully, for had he not told the truth about that? And when his lovely wife died, had he not set aside his own sorrow to comfort theirs over their bereavement of the Holy City?

Now around the edge of a gray tile Ezekiel drew the familiar outline of the sacred hills. Within it he began to draw an outline of two square courtyards, with steps leading from one to the next. Suddenly Jonathan's oldest boy cried out, "It's the Temple, father!" He looked a bit puzzled. "It's not just the way we draw it in religious school, but it's our Temple."

Never had such a storm of enthusiasm swept over the meeting. Jacob thrust Jonathan out of the way and was promptly elbowed aside himself, for everyone was crazy to look on at once. "Solomon's Temple!" cried Jacob with a catch in his voice, for it was so long since his father had mentioned it. At that cry Ezekiel raised his head.

"Not Solomon's Temple," he said clearly. "This is God's new temple, to be built when we return to Jerusalem. I shall not live to see that day, perhaps Jacob will not, but his sons will surely return home. There they must help to rebuild the temple. See, here is the Holy of Holies . . . here the priests will live . . . here the temple servants. . . ."

An hour later Ezekiel was still answering questions about the new temple. He answered everything anybody could think of. One could see that he had lived with the very idea for months and years. Every query roused him to a new pitch of enthusiasm. Finally one stray wistful word roused him to the highest point he ever reached.

"You are sure we shall return?"

"Certain," cried the prophet, "for thus saith the Lord God, 'Behold, I myself, even I, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.'" Into the words Ezekiel put all his own long passion of shepherding, the faithful daily miles he had tramped through the Hebrew colony on pastoral errands. He understood God at last. "'As a shepherd

seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered broad, so I will seek out my sheep; and I will deliver them out of all places whither they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel' " . . . .

"Ah, the mountains!" Every last man in the room drew a homesick breath. Here and there an old man began to weep for joy. Even the young men born in Babylonia had been told all their lives that mountain air was pure and sweet as honey, not like this stifling air of the monotonous plains. In the general tumult Ezekiel sat quietly, his forgotten tile in his lap. Jonathan slipped down beside him with a puzzled query.

"But you've been teaching us all these years that God is here, too. If home is where God is—then why do we need to go back to Jerusalem?"

Ezekiel gave the young man a startled look. He spoke very slowly, like one who has never quite thought his way through a dilemma. "God is here indeed. But I think these have never really believed it after all. I have failed with them. They can't really worship except in a familiar building, so I've given them a building to dream about." Was there a touch of wistful irony in the prophet's worn face? Jonathan would have pressed his question, but Ezekiel saw that others were beginning to listen. He dropped the clue too hard for all to follow, and deliberately slipped back into his generation. It was not only to Jonathan that he spoke, nor to those within hearing, but to every Jew in Babylonia. "Our city shall have a new name," he cried. "It shall be called 'God is there!' "

CHAPTER IX

SLAVES WHO SET MEN FREE

YOUNG ABNER sauntered nonchalantly through the bazaars of Babylon. Yet one on an errand like his in the Jewish quarter had need of eyes in the back of his head and wings at his heels, for court spies were everywhere. And today his very presence smacked of treason to the king.

Not that Abner behaved like a messenger. His very presence at the usual time was almost enough to give notice of the Hebrew meeting on the morrow. He loitered about the booths, buying a few dates from Hananiah and a melon from the next stall. A jeweler's stock interested him for some time, with its mother-of-pearl from the Persian Gulf and necklaces of carnelian and amethyst. Every so often he came back to the Booth of New Images to carry on vociferous bargaining for a gold-plated image of Marduk himself, chief of the Babylonian gods. No listener could have noted anything more than the reluctance of a half-Babylonian Hebrew to pay twenty shekels if one would suffice. A Hebrew buying an idol would attract no attention at all. Thousands were buying these before New Year's, the day of Marduk's annual festival.

Presently Abner strolled down a lane to Rachel the fortune-teller, a Hebrew widow who made a fat living by interpreting dreams. There before a dozen clients, he told a queer medley of a dream about the Sacred Way mingled

with the names of a dozen Babylonian gods and goddesses. What so natural, indeed, as dreaming about the great procession street on the day before the annual pageant of the images of the gods? Rachel's loud assurances of good fortune were enough to account for Abner's satisfied smile when he came out of her house.

Not till Abner had left the Jewish quarter far behind and was well on his way home toward the farm colony beyond the Euphrates, did he allow himself to think of the results of that afternoon's stroll. "What a cruel shame that Hebrews must creep into holes and corners in order to worship God!" he told himself indignantly. "We, the chosen race though in exile, the children of the great king David! And what a shame that a Hebrew should stoop to make a living by selling idols, or telling fortunes by omens! We are getting more than half heathen here in exile." Yet Abner was well aware that a fortune-teller and an image-seller would spread the news of the Sabbath meeting farther than the sellers of dates or jewelry. "Not many will dare come tomorrow," his thoughts ran on, "and no wonder. Who can blame them when the heathen New Year falls on our Sabbath? Hananiah was almost going to refuse to let us into his master's warehouse for the meeting. Why, the grand procession of the gods, high up on the Sacred Way, will pass almost over our heads! True, as he said, if his master should catch us——" Brave as he was, Abner shuddered at the very thought of a fate so dreadful.

Still, what Babylonian would ever leave the glorious spring festival in order to go to a warehouse? Or who would ever miss a score of faithful Hebrews from the throngs of thousands of devout pilgrims, come from every corner of the empire to honor the national gods? On the

other hand, how many Hebrews would risk the king's wrath by staying away from a patriotic festivity? Very few. Not one who had money or position to lose. For this king Nabonidas had made Babylon the center of worship for the whole kingdom, not leaving minor gods in their local shrines as Nebuchadnezzar had been content to do. At no time in almost fifty years of exile had it been harder to keep Hebrew worship alive in Babylon than it was right now! In fact, the majority were in danger of giving it up altogether.

One thing Abner simply had not dared to mention, for the very sound of it was suspicious. Their rabbi had a wonderful new scroll—he was pledged to tell no one whence it came, but he hinted the contents to Abner—a glorious new prophecy of *freedom!* If they should be discovered with that in their possession, Abner dared not think what would happen.

On the Sabbath morning a dozen timid Hebrews slipped, one by one, into the dark warehouse not half a mile from the Sacred Way. Until the rabbi lighted the candles, there was a breathless hush, for one never knew till then whether a spy might have slipped in among them. A little gasp of relief cut the air as glances revealed no strange faces. Here were only the faithful few—slaves, tenders of small booths in the bazaar, or farmers who dared brave the anger of the king.

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one." The rabbi began the service with the words of Moses, centuries old. Then he read the opening prayers, and a passage from the sacred law book of Moses. Presently he spoke with lowered voice. "In strange and secret manner a new scroll has come into my hands," he said. "I feel that it

brings the words of the Lord our God. It is a song of comfort, a song of"—his voice sank to a whisper—"of *freedom*." Heavy eyes lifted here and there, only to drop again. "Gather close by me," he whispered, "and remember, none must cry aloud, lest someone overhear."

Abner dropped down close by the rabbi's feet, others followed. Their leader unrolled a new scroll from a finely tooled leather case, and began to read in an undertone.

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me: because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the poor; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, to comfort all that mourn . . ."

"Hark!" cried Hananiah, but everyone had heard it—the far-off blare of trumpets. The sound was muffled by warehouse walls, dulled by the distance, yet unmistakable. Every head was lifted toward the northwest whence the sound came, everyone saw in imagination what most of them had seen every year since babyhood. The great procession of the gods from Ishtar Gate down the Sacred Way was beginning! White-robed priests were marching first, carrying aloft the images of Marduk, lord of Babylon, and his son Nabu, who had come from across the Euphrates to visit his father on New Year's day. These were clothed in purple and crowned with gold. A score of gods and goddesses of Marduk's train followed them, each borne high by worshippers on the great white road where no chariot was allowed. Down the white pavement, past the golden lions that stalked in procession on the blue-tiled walls, came marching the king and the nobles of Babylon in power and glory.

What could a handful of Hebrew captives do, huddled there in a dark warehouse, against power like that? Abner saw in dismay that each man avoided his neighbor's eyes as heads drooped again. "Liberty—comfort," they seemed to say, "what dead words are these? We are slaves in Babylon."

The rabbi's voice grew urgent as he went on with the interrupted passage. "And they shall build the old wastes," he read with conviction, "they shall repair the old waste cities, the desolations of many generations." He paused to send a compelling, challenging look over the passive group. Save for Abner's, hardly an eye glistened in the flickering candlelight. Utterly limp and discouraged, the best hope of Israel sat dully there.

"He means Jerusalem!" Abner cried impatiently. "Oh, if only my grandfather could hear the good news! If only he had lived to go back!"

"Sh!" came half a dozen frightened voices. Hananiah voiced the general feeling. "What nonsense! How should we escape? How should we ever get back to Jerusalem, more than eight hundred miles away by caravan trail?"

The rabbi listened amazed. Had that magic word *Jerusalem* lost its power to wring a Hebrew wide awake with memories, to stir homesick hearts to action? It could not be that the prophet of hope had spoken too late! Eagerly he chose another passage.

"The voice of one that crieth, 'Prepare ye in the wilderness *the Way of the Lord;* make level in the desert *a highway for our God.* Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the uneven shall be made level, and the rough places plain; and the

glory of the Lord shall be revealed, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.'"

His intense conviction began to take effect at last. Something like an electric current began to spread through the little group, reaching one by one. A sudden medley of questions broke out. "The Way of the Lord—is that the trail home?—But who comes to set us free?—No, it is too late, too late. We shall die in this far heathen land!"

Sobs interrupted the words, great sobs torn from men who for long years had been too far down in misery to make any protest. These were tears that set free, tears that open a way, and the rabbi was too wise to check them. Not till the storm had died down of itself did he say gently, quoting from memory, with no need to find that place in the scroll:

"Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, faintest not, neither is weary . . . He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary . . . but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

In a long, healing silence, rabbi and people faced each other. At last he said, "Teach these words to your children. And spread the news, I will read more from this scroll on the next Sabbath day." And so, after prayer, he dismissed them.

Only Abner remained to raise a protest. "But why did you not tell them in plain words what you told me?" he demanded. "They did not take it in, that we are really going home at last. Why did you not tell them the writer

lives at court, he hears the palace news, he actually knows that Babylon will soon fall and we shall be set free?"

"Hush!" The rabbi lowered his voice again. "Could you not see, they are not ready for freedom? Their very minds are slaves, and no wonder. Freedom? Remember, that is only for those brave and hardy enough to dare the long journey back to rebuild a ruined Jerusalem."

Abner shook his head impatiently. He would have told the full ground of hope in that very meeting. The rabbi gave him a searching look, then spoke close to his ear. "You are ready for it, I will tell you something more. The prophet sees yet more to come, something glorious. Listen!" He watched the young man's face light up in startled radiance, and added a final warning. "Remember, no hint of that yet. Were the secret to leak out, the letters would cease, and we must have them to keep hope alive until the day of deliverance."

Once in the open air, the blare of trumpets seemed to burst all around them, though it came from half a mile to the west, where the Sacred Way arched like a bow above the low houses of Babylon. Abner walked away on air, his heart full to bursting with this new, incredible idea. Long trained to caution, however, he sought a round-about way toward the festival, and passed unnoticed into the throngs that shouted for Marduk and the glory of Babylon. Suddenly a query gripped his whole mind. Could he not *recognize* the writer of that scroll, if he could find him in the king's train? Why, such glorious ideas must glow in a man's very face! Swiftly he made for a friendly housetop whence he might overlook the coming procession. He paid no heed to the small boys who called after him,

"Bridegroom! Bridegroom!" How should he know that his own face was shining with joy?

The second royal band was just coming into sight as Abner mounted to the crowded roof. Eagerly he scanned its ranks for Hebrew features. Many Hebrews, as everyone knew, had risen to government or palace employ, some with their religion, more without it. Suddenly Abner gasped in wonder. Certainly that musician who came playing the double flute of carved ivory was the one he sought! A face beautiful as a statue, with great dark eyes and the full lips of a singer—why, Abner knew him by reputation. A court musician, a favorite of the king's, yet this man was known to worship the Hebrew God. Abner glanced about him furtively. Couldn't everyone, he thought, read the transparent secret of so noble a face? Yet apparently none noticed one musician among so many, or left off shouting for Marduk, lord of Babylon.

The strong snarl of trumpets faded out of Abner's ears. For the moment his spirit was free of the jostling throng on the housetop. Nor could it be confined to any quarter of that tremendous, crushing city, or even within that great empire. It met with the prophet's spirit and soared far away on the wings of the last words the rabbi had quoted to him alone:

"It is too light a thing to restore Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth. Kings shall arise and see; princes, and they shall worship, because of the Lord God that is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who hath chosen thee."

What, captive Israel was to become a maker of freedom! That was the meaning of her long sufferings in exile, plain

at last. She, the chosen people, had not lost her place in the world after all. Her few faithful ones, lost now in forlorn exile, some day were to lead the whole world to the worship of the one true God. Slaves?—No, servants of God to set men free!

The band went by, and among the lesser sounds Abner came back to himself. He looked around among the crowd with a new sense of sympathy, of understanding. Why, in spite of all their shouting for Marduk, these Babylonians were sad at heart and weary-eyed. They were homesick for the one true God whom they did not know. Ah, thought Abner, Israel would lead them! A new turn for the rabbi's first message came exulting into his mind hot from the new vision:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon *us,* because he hath appointed *us* to preach good tidings, to proclaim liberty to all captives, to comfort all that mourn!"

CHAPTER X

NEVER A WALL SO HIGH

Out from the irregular shadows of the ruined wall a cloaked figure stole into the moonlight. A moment later the man swung up on a donkey's back and began a famous midnight ride around the broken defences of Jerusalem.

In that brilliant summer moonlight, the ruined bulwarks towered in strange broken shapes above the encircling ravines. Here, huge fragments bordered a breach that split the wall clear down to the donkey's feet. Just beyond, the old masonry rose two hundred feet in air. So the whole wall had stood solidly, before Nebuchadnezzar's battering-rams burst it apart, before the Exile nearly a century ago.

Something in the set of the rider's shoulders revealed competence and purpose though his headdress covered his face. He did not look like the hunted peasants who crept about these walls in daylight. Still less did he suggest the wild Bedouins who still raided once in a while though little was left worth plundering. He rode on above the ravines on the west and south, pausing wherever a blackened smear around a gap meant that a city gate had recently been burned away.

At the southeast corner of the walls the donkey balked, for even the most sure-footed of beasts could go no farther. Here stones ten feet long had been dislodged by Nebuchadnezzar's catapults, and flung clear down the hill

to the eastern torrent-bed. The rider dismounted and picked a careful way northward up the valley. Finally he threw back his headdress, studied the ruins on the height above him and groaned at what he saw there—the broken shell of a cast-off city!

Now the moonlight revealed a face with strong brow and resolute chin. It was Nehemiah the Jew, once a slave, now a governor. Two months ago he had been cup-bearer to the Persian king, now he was the newly-appointed pasha of Jerusalem. He brought a firman from Artaxerxes himself to rebuild these ruined walls, though no one in the forlorn little city knew it as yet. When at last he made his way back to the waiting donkey, he walked briskly as though now that he had seen the worst, he knew exactly what he was going to do.

Such a challenge at such odds would have staggered most men. Rebuild a wall that had lain open all the long years since the Exile, till no one had any respect for it? Do it in the very face of the hostile Bedouins, sure to attack the moment their right to plunder was questioned? Worse yet, how could it be done unchallenged by the Samaritan enemy whose governor, Sanballat, was a sworn enemy? In fact it was he who had led the attack that burned the gates last year. Build and fight at the same time, that was what rebuilders would have to do, with none to fight except the thoroughly disheartened little Jewish community. Yet this was exactly what Nehemiah had come fifteen hundred miles at his own urgent request and his own expense to do!

Another in Nehemiah's place would have uttered curses upon Sanballat, or cries of pity for the forlorn little town, so stripped of its once splendid place in history. Nehemiah

did neither. He raised his hands to heaven. "O God, help us!" he cried. "Hear us, O God, and help us, and that right early!"

Three weeks later the early summer dawn lighted a vastly different view of the walls of Jerusalem. Every foot along the circuit hummed with life. One long stretch on the south actually rose as a wall again, and was patrolled by a score of sentinels from Nehemiah's Persian bodyguard. For the rest, every breach had a quota of toilers. Some were digging away at the thorn-matted earth, others carried away bucketfuls of rubbish on their heads. A very few were hoisting huge fragments back into place and filling the gaps with handfuls of rocks and cement. Most of them worked as if their lives depended on it, which was true enough. So they had worked from dawn to starlight, every day since Nehemiah had organized them. Everyone knew that the pasha and his bodyguard worked and watched longer hours than anyone else. As usual, he seemed to be everywhere at once this morning, cheering on the workers and at the same time keeping a sharp watch for the enemy.

Suddenly a bugle sounded on the northern wall, Nehemiah's signal. The Samaritan enemy was coming! Every man dropped his tools, lifted spear or sword from his girdle and ran toward the sound.

"Here's Sanballat after us again!" Joab cried to the neighbor who ran alongside. "What's he got to say this time? Remember what he said last Tuesday—'Can they recover stones from the rubbish heaps when the very stones are burned?'"

"What his friend Tobiah said is worse," replied Judah gloomily. "I can't forget that—'If a fox went up, he would knock down that stone wall of theirs.'"

"Not my stone wall!" protested Joab. "No fox in Judah could climb the part I've been building right above my own house."

"That's one good thing," admitted Judah. "We're all working to protect our own houses. But I tell you, I'm played out. We never in this world can get all the rubbish cleared away. We never can get a decent wall up before the Samaritans collect an army. And when they break in, as they did last year, it's all up with us. I'm ready to quit right now, and I know a lot more who" . . .

"Nonsense!" Joab was positive. "Nehemiah wasn't here last year. That makes all the difference. He knows all these things we know, but he doesn't feel the same way about them, he seems to think we can win just the same. Do you suppose it's because he prays so much?—Anyway, he'll call Sanballat's bluff. Just you wait and see!"

The Samaritan detachment had halted just beyond reach of any defender's spear. Their surprise attack had plainly failed, for a hundred laborers had already reached the point where Nehemiah stood among his heavily-armed bodyguard. A rapid consultation followed down below. Then Sanballat, pasha of Samaria and thus Nehemiah's equal under the Persian king, stepped forward.

"What are you doing up there?" His tone was official, as though he were making a tour of inspection. "This looks like rebellion against our lord the Persian king!" Some of the leaders pressing about Nehemiah began to look anxiously at one another. Judah nudged Joab.

"What did I tell you? If he goes tattling to Artaxerxes and takes that line, we haven't a chance in the world."

Sanballat pressed his advantage. "You mean to make yourself king, I presume?" He kept just the right tone for

one who warns an adventurer. "You'll get into trouble with Artaxerxes when he hears of this, as he surely will." He paused to let that sink in. "However, I have influence in the Persian palace. Hadn't you better come down and talk it over with me before you go any further?"

Nehemiah was apparently unaware of the panic behind him. "The same useless message, for the fifth time!" he called back. "So I tell you for the fifth time, I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" Nehemiah raised his voice and spoke as a king's favorite speaks to an upstart. "You have seen the firman of King Artaxerxes. Why should you rebel against his royal orders that this wall must be rebuilt?" That shot told. The Samaritans were plainly taken aback at this version of their private hatreds. More than one man plucked Sanballat's sleeve urgently.

For those on the wall it was a tense moment because Sanballat might decide to attack first and explain to King Artaxerxes afterwards. "If they make for us now, we're done for," breathed Judah. "I haven't had a decent meal nor a decent night's rest for a month, nor any of us. A score of the men feel just as I do. Come on, I'll lead a strike if you'll help." But Joab shook his head.

"Not till our walls are up," he whispered back. "Let Nehemiah handle us till then. After that, perhaps—hush!" Nehemiah faced about and began to speak to his wavering people.

"We will fight if we have to," said their pasha. "Have no fear of them, but remember the Lord who is great and terrible, and fight for your kinsfolk, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses." Then he turned back to face the enemy in silence.

"He's praying when he looks like that," whispered Joab to Judah, who only shrugged impatient shoulders.

"What of it? Do you suppose for a moment that praying will keep Sanballat out of here if Sanballat decides to break in?"

"I don't just know." Joab was puzzled. "It makes Nehemiah different—*look there!*"

For after a moment long enough to snap Jewish morale almost to breaking, Sanballat and his men faced about and went marching homeward. A hush fell on the defenders, as though they dared not break the spell by cheers. A medley of curses floated back from the north road, but Nehemiah wasted no breath on those. Instead, he sent Judah and Joab and the rest scrambling back to mend the wall each by his own house.

Within the week Nehemiah sent around a heartening message. "Take courage, for within this month we shall hold a great festival and dedicate our walls to God!" But that very night a desperate deputation stopped the pasha as he descended the walls in starlight. Judah and Joab headed it.

"We'll never live to see that festival unless you give us justice," cried Judah. "We're all ready to strike if you won't listen."

Nehemiah did listen. What he heard was so serious that the next morning he sent none but his own bodyguard up to work and watch. Instead, he called an assembly of the whole Jewish community, with their priests to witness. "Judah," he ordered, "stand forth and tell everyone what you told me."

"I sold my son to a foreigner yesterday." Stark truth rang in Judah's voice. "I sold him to buy bread that the

rest of my family might not starve. And Joab here has sold his daughter, whom my son was to have married when the walls were up." He could say no more.

Joab went on.

"You all know how the spring wheat harvest failed before the pasha came. Since he arrived, we have been working night and day on the walls; aye, and gladly, too. But we could not go outside to tend our vineyards and olive groves for fear of the Samaritans. They have reaped our olives and figs for us by this time! So what can we have to exchange for bread? Myself, I borrowed of a rich noble here in Jerusalem this spring, but I had no money to pay the interest, and now he has taken my daughter for the debt."

Everywhere through the crowd voices rose hoarsely in similar stories. It was as though until now each man had kept silence, thinking himself the only sufferer. "We have all had to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king's tax!" Judah's voice rose once more. "Our blood is the blood of our fellows, our children are like their children, and yet we must let them have our sons and daughters to be their slaves."

"I have no money to buy my daughter back," Joab's voice rang above the rest. "And tell me, how shall I get food to keep my family alive? Shall I sell them, one by one?" The last question went echoing around, "Sell them, one by one?"

Judah raised his head with a flash of bitter insight. "That's what we poor men get for working on the walls to protect rich men's property here in Jerusalem!" he shouted. "There's never a wall so high it can keep out the profiteers who live inside!"

Turmoil followed his words. Half the assembly cried out

at once. They turned on the few wealthy men, the leaders who had been fed free at Nehemiah's table ever since he came, a hundred and fifty of them. Riot and mutiny were in the air, and worse yet, secession. For the men of property, shamed before all their fellows, drew haughtily together with furious mutterings. If the few substantial men should retire and make common cause with Sanballat, what would become of the plan to restore the Holy City?

Nehemiah raised his hands to heaven in a well-known gesture, and looked far beyond the seething crowd for a long moment. Then he spoke without a trace of fear. More than that, he flung a challenge straight into the midst. "You are doing wrong!" he cried to the furious leaders. "I myself have done wrong, too, for I have accepted interest on loans to my poor fellow-countrymen. Is it a time for Jew to make profit from Jew, with the whole countryside rising against us? I tell you I will never do it again."

Leaving the rich to think that over, Nehemiah spoke directly to Judah and Joab. "The king's tax is the king's tax. Let that be. But the pasha's tax—have I ever taken that from you?" They shook bewildered heads. "Yet you know that former pashas and their households ate your bread and wine at the rate of twenty-five dollars a day. Is it not so?" They could not but admit it. "Then trust me now." He turned back to the leaders, with a sudden solemn enthusiasm that fairly took their breath away. "Come," he cried, "follow me, and let us stand in awe of God. Come now, let us give up taking interest, myself first of all. Come, restore this very day the fields, the vineyards, the olive-presses and the houses you have taken for debt!"

A long pause followed. No wonder the little knot of leaders hesitated to do anything so unheard of. Still, Nehemiah's own confession was curiously disarming, his reminder of unclaimed taxes had been tactfully aimed, and his enthusiasm was contagious. Suddenly a noble from the south country cried out,

"A prophet, a new prophet! Remember how Micah foretold woe on those who sold their fellows into slavery? And Isaiah, here in Jerusalem before the Exile, on those who joined field to field and drove the poor man forth?"

"And our Amos," broke in a landowner from Tekoa, "remember what he said about selling the needy for a pair of shoes!" The tide, already wavering, turned with a rush. The profiteers began to vie with one another in seeking out their debtors, loudly cancelling the debts and calling the priests to solemn witness. So Judah had promise of his son's speedy return, and Joab of his daughter's homecoming.

As for Nehemiah, he dismissed the assembly to their work, and was the first to get back to his job on the walls. Once a praying slave, now a praying pasha, he was the hardest-working man in Jerusalem. He was no prophet, though he had indeed translated half a dozen prophets into action that morning.

CHAPTER XI

A PROPHET IN SPITE OF HIMSELF

The son of Verity stood at the head of the pass from the mountains of Samaria to the Plain of Esdraelon, and looked disconsolately up and down the valley below. Eastward or westward—which way should he go? He shook his fist up the caravan route to the northeast, he shivered as he looked the other way toward the Mediterranean. To his right, far to the east, lay the great cities of Assyria, that cruel empire. To his left was the ocean, which the Hebrew of those days hated and feared like another enemy. If ever a prophet stood between the devil and the deep sea, it was the son of Verity. To be beheaded or drowned—what a choice! To be sure, he might avoid both by returning home to his own village, less than three miles beyond Nazareth which was hidden in the hills opposite him. Did he fear that life in the home town might be tame after his exciting days in Jerusalem? Or did he realize that even there this wretched choice would pursue him?

At last, the son of Verity clutched his pilgrim staff and started down to the Plain of Esdraelon. Once there, his feet acted out the decision he really wanted to make, and marched him off westward, down the Way to the Sea! A profound relief appeared on the prophet's face, now that the decision was over with. A certain sly triumph was visible too, as though he had outwitted Somebody. Indeed

he thought he had, but he wasn't quite sure. All the way down the caravan trail he continued to argue the matter with God, as is the privilege of prophets, and particularly of Hebrews. Did not Father Abraham himself begin it—yes, and win the argument, too?

"I simply *won't* go and preach to the Assyrians!" declared the runaway. "I'd rather run clean out of your territory. The idea of your telling me to go and preach to the wickedest city in the world, and our mortal enemies, too. It doesn't make sense. Me, a successful prophet to the Hebrews, your own chosen race!" And the son of Verity chuckled as he strode along, for how could even God answer such a telling point?

No answer. The protester kept on talking. "You've warned us again and again to have no dealings with the heathen of other races," he recalled in triumph. "Your good old prophet Elijah didn't waste any time converting Jezebel's priests on Mount Carmel up there!" As he looked up toward the long bulk of that famous mountain, the son of Verity stumbled over a stone. The chink of coins in his wallet reminded him of still another objection.

"I'd starve there if the Assyrians didn't kill me. They would, though. Everybody knows the brutes simply behead anybody they don't like. Now this last trip of mine was different. Down in Jerusalem, the king and his nobles paid me well for prophesying that we'd win this next war, and have a gorgeous revenge on all our enemies. Said it was fine for the army morale to hear such talk."

The son of Verity relaxed a bit, for he certainly had made good in his only experience as a prophet, and he a country lad at that, on his first trip to the capital. However, the doubt at the bottom of his mind grew heavier the

nearer he came to the sea. Was he really escaping clean out of God's jurisdiction? He went on arguing about it to bolster up his courage. "If I have to lose my life on that terrible ocean, then You'll be sorry You drove me to it!" was the only conclusion he reached.

The first sight of the sea confirmed the villager's worst suspicions. It was a most uncanny blue, and it slithered around like a living creature. All he had ever heard of dragons and sea-monsters—which was plenty—crowded into his mind. How he loathed that bitter smell, those boisterous sounds, and the queer sliding motion! He could hardly force himself to go south to the seaport of Joppa, where sea-monsters were said to be particularly active. The only reason he went on was that he didn't dare go back.

A woe-begone young Hebrew finally reached the docks at Joppa. A score of sailors were loading a Spanish Line merchant galley with embroidered silks for a far-away queen and armlets of gold for a far-away king, and the scent of Indian spices hung on the air. The runaway found no romance in that, nor in the sailors' chanteys, either. As for the little tub-shaped galley, the very sight of it made him squirm. Those slim oars of pine, sticking out like spiders' legs—what use would they be if the sea decided to move from under? The son of Verity stepped gingerly up the gangplank. He shut his ears to certain remarks about landlubbers, for after all, what did the opinion of foreigners matter to a man of the chosen race?

In the first hundred yards out from shore, the son of Verity suffered untold agony. The only passenger, he sat on the hurricane deck with the captain. The sea commenced to slide beneath the boat as though some dragon were crawling there. "O God," the son of Verity was be-

ginning, when the most devastating thought smote him. He had got what he wanted—he was actually out of God's territory, and he couldn't even pray! It was the last straw. He must have looked the way he felt, for the captain told him to go below where he wouldn't feel the motion. The wretched one fled below, found a corner on the rowing level and sank to sleep from sheer nervous exhaustion.

A moment later, it seemed to the runaway, he was rudely shaken awake into a world gone to pieces. "Wake up!" yelled the captain. "Don't you know there's a storm? Do your share with the rest of us—hurry up and pray!" The young man sank desolately back on the pitching floor. The captain added anxiously, "You've got a god, haven't you? Every man jack is praying to his own."

Indeed above all the crashing of thunder and the slap of the waves, could be heard a frantic medley of prayers to every god worshipped around the Mediterranean—the Sun-god, the Storm-god, the Thunder-god and a dozen more. All of a sudden the men left off praying and crowded about the lone silent stranger. "Haven't you got any god?" they demanded. "Who are you, anyway? What are you doing here?"

"I'm a Hebrew," the son of Verity managed to stutter. "I worship the God of the land and sea, but I'm running away from Him." Even the speaker realized how ridiculous that sounded. Even in the midst of terror, these foreign sailors roared with derision.

"He worships the God of the land and sea, but he thinks he can run away from Him!" They drew together for a moment, and came back with looks that boded the prophet no good. "See here!" the captain shouted above the roar of the storm, "we think it's you that's putting all our lives

in danger. This is no common kind of a storm. We've cast lots to find who's to blame, and the lot falls on you. We think you've offended your God by running away. The question is, what are we do with you?"

The disconsolate deserter resigned himself to his fate. After all, he couldn't afford to let the heathen outdo him in courtesy. "Throw me overboard," he replied with the fairness so obviously expected of him. "It can't be any worse than this, and I don't blame you one bit." The last sound he heard as the sailors pitched him over the rounding stern was their prayer to his own God:

"Please, God of the Hebrews, don't blame us for throwing your man overboard, for we really didn't know what else to do."

Now the son of Verity was no diver, and he hit the waves with a slap that spanked the wind out of him. Down, down he sank, surely to the very roots of the ocean. His imagination had time to people the waters with slimy, scaly, smelly forms, crowding about on all sides, sure to devour him. . . .

When at last the son of Verity awoke to himself, he lay half-drowned on the sand-dunes north of Joppa, clutching yards of evil-smelling seaweed. In front of him stretched blue waters flat as a floor. All round him poured the hot sunshine. There were no clouds except the white ones, matted high above the shores of Africa. Very slowly, memory came back to him.

"The storm," he stammered, "but there isn't any storm!—How did I get ashore?—There's some magic about this. I'd better get away from here." He staggered up on unsteady feet. Far across the quiet waters he saw the yellow sail of the Spanish Line galley, and the story of his futile

flight came back to him. He marvelled. "Well, what I told the rowers is true," he cried, "God *IS* everywhere!" But he found small comfort in that, for the logical conclusion was only too clear. "Then I've got to go and preach to that wicked city," he groaned, "just as God told me to do."

So the circumvented prophet started north for the Mediterranean terminus of the Damascus and Nineveh caravan trail. The caravan he joined took him straight by the foot of the hill behind which lay Nazareth and his own home, but he never even looked up. He was grimly bent on doing his duty.

Four months had passed since the village boy had set forth to Jerusalem to be a prophet. Now, much the wiser for continuous travel, he was approaching Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. Summer had come, and the fords of the Euphrates and Tigris were low. Much talk with men of many races had prepared him somewhat for the cosmopolitan city beyond the two rivers. He had picked up the common speech of the caravans, and besides, the language of Nineveh was said to be very like his own.

The son of Verity was more competent to preach repentance after having experienced it himself. Besides, it was some comfort to know that God would still be on hand, so that he could argue with Him. In one way it was a relief to have learned that God's territory has no bounds. On the other hand, it was a great responsibility to know what nobody else appeared to know.

With all these thoughts to trouble him, the son of Verity paid little attention to the glories of Nineveh. The great moat, the huge river-gates, the massive temples and palaces flashing with inlays of gold—these hardly touched him at all. The people fascinated him, though, as he walked all

day long into the heart of the city. He had never suspected there were so many different kinds of people in the world as he was seeing here—men from the Arabian desert, men from India, men from the mountains of Armenia. A brand-new thought began to thrust itself up through some crevice in the tight wall of his race prejudice. Did God know about all these different people? And could it be possible that He cared for them, too?

On the following day, with very mixed feelings, the son of Verity began to preach. "Yet forty days," he cried monotonously, over and over again, "yet forty days, and for her sins, Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Everybody stopped to listen in a way that was nothing less than amazing. They crowded about the Hebrew stranger, they hung on his few and pointed words. Then they rushed off home to tell the neighbors and to bewail their sins, which they evidently knew far more about than the strange visitor did. There was no sign whatever of the barbarous cruelty for which Nineveh was known far and wide, but rather the most intense human concern. Another day of this, and the king on his throne heard of it. He sent forth a royal decree that all his people must repent of their sins and pray to God to save them from destruction. Which was exactly what they were already busied in doing—fasting, and praying night and day.

In the very face of his success, a reaction smote the Hebrew preacher. Why, these foreigners, these brutal enemies who had so often threatened to destroy Jerusalem without mercy—what a shame, after all, that they should repent and so escape their perfectly just deserts! The son of Verity felt as though God himself had somehow let him down. If outsiders repented and were so readily forgiven,

why, then, where was the advantage of belonging to God's own chosen race?

In this crisis, the chagrined preacher marched out of the city and climbed one of the low hills to the east for a final argument with God. "You've no business loving any other race as well as You do the Hebrews!" he stormed. "I can't understand it. You may just go and get another prophet."

In spite of the blistering midsummer sun, the son of Verity was fairly comfortable, for a tropical vine spread its broad leaves over his head. Thus sheltered, he continued to argue with God for the rest of the day. He went to sleep feeling better.

The next morning, however, a terrible sirocco blew in from the desert, bringing a scorching blast of sand that killed the vine, and the preacher was left shelterless. He was furious with God for betraying him once again. But his wrath had hardly got under way when something happened within him. A certain strange coolness and stillness arose inside his mind, flooded his thoughts and took possession of them. It breathed through them something that had never been dreamed of by a common man in all this world before:

"Do you do well to be angry," so the thought shaped itself, "because this vine has withered away? You never made a vine, you never made anything that has life. I made the vine; I made the world. I made the people you saw in Nineveh, every one of them, of whatever race or nation. I made the babies, thousands of them so tiny that they know not their right hand from their left. I made the herds of cattle out there in the suburbs, too. *Shall I not have mercy on the souls that I made, now that they know me and cry unto me?"*

The thought ceased as gently as music, though the inner coolness remained for some time. When it, too, had faded out, the young preacher rose to his feet with the look of a great Hebrew prophet on his face; a look of tolerance, of compassion, of fellow-feeling. Now he knew what it was that he had learned from his unwilling travels. He realized that he had argued himself at last out of his tight-walled village into the very presence of the God of sky and sea and land and men.

And Jonah, the son of Amittai which means Verity, or Truth, set off homeward full of a radical sermon that he wanted to preach. It was not new to the high prophets of his people, but to him it was gloriously new, bursting fresh out of experience: God is everywhere, and God loves every soul that He has made.

CHAPTER XII

FROM A CAVE TO A KINGDOM

"HALT! Who goes there?" Hardly more than a wood-pigeon's coo had broken the silence of the night, but Jonathan's ear had caught the faint scrape of a sandal on the broken rocks. He shrank closer into the thicket at the cave's mouth.

"'God is with us!'" His brother's voice gave the password, and a big fellow clad in a tunic of skins parted the branches and followed Jonathan into the cave. There by a fire of twigs sat the other three brothers, with faces set and anxious. They sprang up eagerly when Judas entered.

"Thank God, Judas!" cried one of them. "You have been gone two days now, and we feared lest some wandering Syrian had cut you down. What news?" Judas stretched himself with a mighty reach that nearly filled the little cave. The firelight lit up a handsome, merry face, a great bronzed chest and sturdy limbs: a young man trained by hardship into perfect condition.

"Good news," he laughed. "I know the enemy's plans, and we march tonight when the moon rises. But tell me, have you any food to spare? I have not eaten or slept since I left the cave." Jonathan, whose eyes had not left his hero for an instant, sprang toward a pocket in the limestone walls.

"Here, Judas," cried the boy, holding out a double hand-

ful of parched wheat. "Take it," he urged passionately, for Judas's keen look showed that he knew his brothers had set it aside from their own scant rations.

"Better parched wheat in a cave than the foul meats of the Tyrant," said Judas, accepting the gift. "Tyrant"—the most terrible word in the world to a Jewish ear in the time of King Antiochus! The fire of intense hatred, always close to the surface, leaped through it now. All his brothers cried out at once.

"Curses on him who despoiled our temple!—Who stole the sacred vessels!—Who set the heathen altar on top of God's altar, and bade us sacrifice upon it to a heathen god!—Who would force us to eat the flesh of swine—we defy him forever!" (For to eat swine is forbidden in the Jewish law.) The eyes of Judas Maccabeus grew sadder and sterner, but he kept on munching parched wheat, for a great battle must be fought on the morrow.

"All this have we known for close on three years," he observed drily. "Why else have we taken to the woods and caves like bandits, if not to fight for pure religion and the one God? Have you no news, before I sleep for an hour?" Jonathan made an eager offer.

"A new story, Judas! Have you heard the story of how Daniel refused the food of the kings of Babylon?" Judas's tired eyes lighted, and he relaxed a little.

"These stories of Daniel go flying through our camp in right good season," he cried. "They put new heart into our men. What is this new one?"

"You remember," began Jonathan, "how our father used to tell us of the three brave boys cast into the fiery furnace; but this tale he never heard. Yet it happened when Daniel first came into Babylon in the Exile. The great king

Nebuchadnezzar chose out the best of the young Jewish nobles, to have them trained in all the wisdom and knowledge of his people. After their training, these Hebrews were to serve among his wise men at court. So a score of the boys were set apart. They were to live in the king's palace, and feast every day on wine and meat from his own royal table" . . .

"What!" Judas interrupted. "But that meat was unclean! Doubtless it had been offered before the king's idols. And certainly the animals were not killed according to our sacred Law."

Jonathan laughed. "But of course, Judas, why else the story? Assuredly Daniel knew all that. But he was in the king's power, with no good sword to defend himself. So he used his wits. The king had ordained that these boys should be fed and trained thus for three years" . . .

The brothers looked at each other significantly, though none interrupted. Another likeness to their own situation—three years of servitude!

"But Daniel did not intend to eat unclean food, though it came from the king," exulted Jonathan. "He dared to speak to the head of the king's palace staff about it. But the officer was afraid. 'I dare not change your diet,' he said. 'My lord the king has ordered it, and I fear lest he find you in worse condition than the other lads. You would make me risk my life with the king.' But Daniel tried again. This time he went to the steward in charge of the Hebrew boys, to make a proposal for himself and for the three other boys who had decided to stand by him. 'Try us for ten days,' he begged. 'That can make little difference to you. Give us vegetables to eat, and water to drink. At the end of the ten days, then see if we have lost weight, or

look worse than the other Hebrews. Then you may treat us accordingly.' "

"He should have died rather than touch unclean food!" The most hot-headed of the brothers struck in harshly. "Remember what happened in the days of our persecution. Many in Israel stood firm and determined in their minds that they would not eat unclean things, and chose rather to die than profane the Holy Covenant: *and they did die!*"

Judas smiled. "True, but we used our wits, and live to serve our country," he pointed out. "I like this Daniel. Go on, Jonathan."

"So the steward took away the king's meat and wine and gave them vegetables and water, as Daniel had asked. And at the end of the ten days"—the boy's face glowed in the firelight—"they were actually better-looking than the other boys! They could run better, they were in better training. And when at last all the Hebrew students were brought to the king for examination, Daniel with these three knew more than all the rest."

Judas nodded. "Of course," he said gravely, "for they controlled their bodies to keep their brains clear, as we must do. God grant that we be stronger, and march better on parched wheat than all the king's armies that eat his filthy pork.—A fine heartening tale, Jonathan.—Wake me at moonrise." And Judas stretched out on the cave floor just as he was, to fall asleep in two seconds. Jonathan slipped out into the thicket to watch for the moon.

Within the hour Jonathan came back. "It will soon be light as day!" he cried. Judas sprang up at the sound of his voice. "Call our men to the top of the ridge," he ordered. "I will join you there shortly, and give my news before we march. Simon, you are chief armorer."

In less than half an hour three thousand determined men had gathered on the mountain ridge that is the backbone of Judea. They had crept out of the ravines where they had lain hidden, awaiting their captain's return. A bold-looking band they were, lean and bronzed and sturdy. Their faces were curiously sad and earnest. It looked more like a prayer-meeting than a council of war, especially as there was so little armor to be seen.

A prayer-meeting it became indeed, after Judas had told his news. "You know that three armies are gathered against us in the plains below," he cried. "Yesterday I learned that General Gorgias has spied out our hiding-place and marches his army up here—tonight!" Lips tightened and fists were clenched throughout the band, but no man spoke. "So we outwit him," continued Judas, smiling. "We march down to the plain by the other road. That means we shall have one less army to fight!" A grim laugh broke out, quickly checked. "Yet listen! General Nicanor has issued a proclamation that, after his victory, there will be plenty of Hebrew slaves for sale. For sale, men—*he means us*—for sale cheap in blocks of ninety. And the slave-traders have flocked in from the coast with much gold and silver to buy us. They rest there in his camp with fetters for us: *their slaves!*"

Judas did not check the deep sullen cries of rage. Finally he spoke solemnly. "God will deliver us. They trust to arms and daring deeds, but we rely upon the Almighty God, who by a word can lay low our enemies and the whole world.—O God," he cried passionately, "cast our enemies down with the sword of them that love thee, and let all that know thy name praise thee with songs of thanksgiving."

"Amen, and amen!" echoed all over the mountain top. Then Judas gave his last challenge. "Remember how my father defied the king's officers, and repeat his words of defiance after me, as many as will." A roar from three thousand throats followed him in those great words:

"If all the nations that are within the king's dominions obey him by forsaking, every one of them, the worship of their fathers, yet will we walk in the covenant. Heaven forbid that we should forsake the Law; but the law of the king we will not obey by departing from our worship, either to the right hand or the left."

Deep silence followed. When at last Judas spoke, his tone stung his men to life. "Even to the last word, we will obey the sacred Law!—Now it is written that before a battle, certain ones must go home. All the newly-married, all the vine-dressers and builders of houses—these must withdraw. And the Law adds, all those that are afraid—but of such have we none here."

Slowly all through the band, men turned aside with hanging heads. True, the Law bade these retire, for if they were slain in battle, how should the nation carry on in time of peace? But to lose the glory of a battle like this—how terrible! Yet they obeyed, till several hundred had gone down the hill. The rest pressed closer to fill the gaps.

Judas laughed the merry laugh which made his men love him so well. "Now are we like little David against huge Goliath," he cried, "but there is no difference in the sight of Heaven to save by many or by few; for strength is from Heaven. Remember, David won! And we have better armor than he. At the head of the west ravine, Simon will give you all the helmets and shields and swords that we have captured from our enemies.

"My father bade us often recall the deeds of our fathers who were found faithful in the midst of temptation and distress. Therefore I will tell you now the story of how our brave forefather Daniel came alive out of the den of lions. You have heard the tale around the campfire, but hear it once again, for if we keep courage, we shall conquer the lions, too."

The soldiers hung on every word as though they had not heard the story a thousand times before. "Now the great king Darius of Babylon," began Judas, "set three presidents over his vast dominions, and one of them was Daniel. The governors of all the provinces were to report to these three. Now the other two were jealous, for none of them worshipped the one true God, and they hated to see a foreigner so high in the king's favor. Yet they could find no fault in him.

"We shall never find any ground of complaint against this Daniel," said one president, "unless we find it in connection with his religion."

"Aha!" cried the other, "let us ask King Darius to make a decree that for thirty days none shall pray except unto him, under penalty of being thrown into a den of lions. The king will be flattered, and he will sign the decree—and we shall shortly be rid of this foreign upstart!"

King Darius did make the decree, for he forgot Daniel, but the presidents remembered. Daniel kept on praying three times a day toward Jerusalem, just as he had done through all the long years since the Exile. The presidents spied on him, and reported to the king. Now no law of the king could ever be changed, and though King Darius was wretchedly sorry, yet even the king must obey the law.

Daniel was flung into the den of lions. But there he prayed to the Lord of Hosts, and God shut the mouths of the lions that they harmed him not. And the whole army joined in the familiar chant:

"For he is the living God,
Forever he endures,
His kingdom never shall be overthrown,
And his dominion has no end:
He saves and rescues,
He does signal acts in heaven and earth:
And he has rescued Daniel
From the power of the lions."

Judas lifted his chest and seemed to grow taller. "Men, let us also pray toward Jerusalem!" he cried. "Let us cry unto heaven, if God will have mercy upon us, and remember the covenant of our fathers, and destroy this army before our force this day. And then all the Gentiles will know that there is indeed one God who redeems and saves Israel! *March!*"

Swiftly each band drew together under its captain, and marched off the ridge. From the west ravine was heard the clang of armor as Simon gave out the captured swords and helmets and shields. Very soon the ridge lay bare and silent in the moonlight—hours before General Gorgias got there with five thousand men and found it deserted at dawn.

The Jewish forces marched seventeen miles down through the Vale of Ajalon, down to the plain where the remaining two armies lay. A swift surprise, a sudden rout, a panic, and the enemy turned and fled toward the cities by the sea. As for the gold of the slave merchants, Judas and his brothers took that to repair the Temple. As for

the slave fetters, these they left to rust among the burning tents on the battle plain.

In that December, just three years to the very day since the despoiling of the Temple, the sacred place was cleansed and a fresh altar was built. Judas Maccabeus was acclaimed high priest in Israel, and his brother Simon was made the ruler of a people once more free. Yet the fighting was not all done, and all too soon Judas was slain in battle. Nevertheless, Israel had peace for many years, and ruled herself, and worshipped according to the true religion: and all because an aged father with five stout sons in Judea, and four captive boys in Babylon, defied kings in order to worship God.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HERMIT OF BURNT CANYON

"CHANGE your hearts! Change your lives! The kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

A gust of burning wind, veering northward from the Dead Sea, swept these words to Andrew's ears. He was beyond ordinary hearing distance, walking there on the upper terrace above the Jordan, but these harsh tones were resonant, as though the preacher were long used to speaking in the open air. Andrew's heart leaped, and he broke into a run. This must be John the Baptist, the man he had been hearing about for nearly a year. Now at last he had left the fishing and walked fifty miles down from Capernaum to hear the man who was setting Judea on fire.

The wind changed or the voice ceased, for Andrew heard no more. However, between the sycamores along the path he began to catch glimpses of a great encampment on the lower banks of the Jordan. The keen eyes of a Galilean fisherman picked out the pavilion of some lord from Jerusalem, pitched high above scores of the flat goats' hair tents of the poor. About the tents were donkeys and goats, proof that many families were camping there to hear John preach.

When Andrew descended to the lower terrace he was amazed to find all sorts of people in the crowd. Many were there from the caravans between Egypt and Arabia whose

route crossed the Jordan at this point. Other groups were rarely found together—doctors of the sacred law from Jerusalem, soldiers of Herod from his fortress nearby, peasants and shepherds from all over Palestine and beyond Jordan, and tax-collectors for the Roman conquerors. Even the Passover crowds who traveled up to Jerusalem by this route every spring were no larger, though attendance on Passover was required of every adult male, and this gathering was voluntary. Passover, too, came in the one beautiful season, when sheets of wild anemones ran up the sides of the canyon. In this July, at two thousand feet below sea-level, waves of heat rose between the burnt sides of the canyon with a pressure that could be felt. Andrew, fresh from the higher country of Galilee, had been a-wash with sweat for the last twenty miles.

In a moment, though, Andrew forgot discomfort, for a tall, gaunt figure rose suddenly from the Jordan and towered, dripping, on the bank. Andrew's mouth fell open in amazement, for all he had heard of John the Baptist had never given him the picture of a man like this. To be sure, everyone had told him of the hermit's wild, unkempt look, pauper diet and desert garb that recalled the primitive prophets—the camel's hair tunic of thick black homespun suitable for nomad tents but not for clothing. Now Andrew saw that these details missed the point, for here was a man of compelling power. Even though John chose to stand silent for the moment, force fairly flowed from him in great waves, more vigorous than another man's speech.

"You just missed it." The man beside Andrew, a camel-driver from a caravan, spoke gloatingly. "Before the

baptism, John sent a group of Pharisees off with a flea in their ear."

"What did they come for? Not baptism?" As a free-minded Galilean, Andrew had small use for the Pharisees, religious leaders though they were, and his tone showed it.

"They said so. I think it was to spy on John for the temple authorities at Jerusalem. But he saw through them. He told them that just belonging to God's chosen people wasn't enough to save them. He told them to go and *do* something to prove they wanted to lead a better life. The nerve of it—to say that to the Pharisees!" Andrew joined in the laughter at the expense of these self-appointed models. A shopkeeper from Jerusalem edged closer.

"A bunch of priests came down last week," he volunteered to the newcomer. "They wanted to know if John was the Messiah, and he said he wasn't. Then, was he Elijah come again? But he told them no, and said he wasn't a prophet, either. I'm sure he must be, though. I never saw one myself, nor any man living, and the Pharisees say the last prophet died four hundred years ago. Still, if he isn't a prophet, what is he? I say" . . .

A tremendous voice put a stop to conversation. John began to preach once more, with the clang of iron in his tones. It was a sermon that left Andrew feeling battered, as though all his barriers had been broken down and fire poured into the ruins; and yet at the same time he felt as if his true self were set free. Like any Jew, he knew what some of the prophets had said, that the great Day of the Lord would come sometime in fire and thunder—but John brought the Day itself crashing about one's startled ears! God was coming soon, he cried vehemently, God was coming himself to cut the bonds of his chosen people

and end the world, and set up his own rule over them alone. The thing to do was to confess one's sins and get right with God immediately, or even a Jew might be left out of the coming kingdom.

The crowd blazed up in answer to the preacher's thrilling conviction. Andrew was one of scores who thronged forward to confess their sins in John's presence and enter the Jordan for baptism in token that they wanted to live clean lives till the kingdom came.

In the days that followed, Andrew heard the same message over and over again, but the words never lost their power. Andrew's simple Galilean mind found no difficulty in believing that God could step into history, if He wanted to, to rescue his chosen race from their slavery. Israel had barely lived on through a long succession of conquests that had strained her endurance to breaking point. Life had never been so hard as it was right now under Roman rule. Something would simply have to happen soon, or Israel would lose heart, give up her high religion and become no better than Greeks or Romans with their many gods and goddesses. God's coming from heaven in person would save the day for true religion. Andrew couldn't imagine any better solution!

Though the message of doom never lost its power over Andrew, yet certain practical questions began to trouble him. He became one of John's men, he was trusted to help baptize people, and just because he was so close to their needs, he began to wonder about something. Evidently the kingdom of God hadn't got here yet—John only expected it—but what were people to do until it came? John was the greatest man Andrew had ever known, but was he helping people to bridge that gap?

Three incidents out of many worried Andrew whenever he thought of them, for they concerned people he had baptized, for whom he felt responsible. The first was a soldier of Herod who came hurrying up, spear held low, a strange frightened look in his eyes. His face that bore marks of hard living was sad now, and desperately earnest. After a brief talk with John, he cast his corselet to a friend and went down into the water for baptism. As he came up, standing unarmed for the moment, he cried out, there before everyone, "What shall I do now?"

"Be content with the pay Herod gives you," John replied sternly. "Never lay a false charge against a citizen in order to force him to buy you off." Andrew could almost read the soldier's bewildered thoughts. Such advice was all very well for a hermit, who had no use for money here in the desert. But up there in Herod's guardroom much money was needed for gambling and treating the crowd to wine. Then what was a soldier to do—turn hermit to get away from temptation? Not likely!

The soldier put on his armor with downcast eyes and stumbled off looking unhappier than when he came. Suddenly Andrew caught sight of a young stranger, looking after the soldier with such intense pity and deep understanding that Andrew cried, "There! That's what the soldier needs, a friend like that to stand by him!"

The young stranger was lost from view as three tax-collectors came to John. Years of unhappiness were written on their faces, years of hurt pride covered with bluster. Now they too stirred with a new hope. Anywhere else hisses would have greeted them, as traitors to their country for collecting taxes imposed by the Roman power. Here

alone they were safe from insult. After baptism they too demanded, "What shall we do now?"

"Never exact more than your fixed rate," John told them. Once more Andrew was disappointed. He shared the dazed feeling of the converts.

"John's the greatest man in the world," Andrew thought loyally, "but he's a hermit. He doesn't understand how hard it is to live. Doesn't he know the collectors haven't any fixed salary? If they gave up extra charges, what would their children have to live on? And what if God doesn't come soon?" Puzzled again, Andrew looked around for the young stranger who had comforted him before. He met what he needed, a warm-hearted smile that understood and forgave even tax-collectors. "A friend like that!" Andrew murmured once more.

Andrew recalled another group of inquirers, ordinary hard-working people like himself, though in their long robes and brilliant girdles they looked like lords beside John. Andrew saw their question coming. "What shall we do now?"

"Let him that has two shirts share with him that has none," came John's answer, "and let him that has food do the same." Andrew's heart sank again, for life outside of the desert was not so simple as that. What would happen when all the food and clothes were given away, your own family was left scantily clad and hungry—*if God had not come?* John was a hermit, safe in his desert. He lived on nature's food like locusts and wild honey, and never worried about where his next meal was coming from. What did he know of the hunger of growing children, of the toil and trouble of ordinary fathers and mothers, often going hungry themselves? Andrew thought again with

longing of that young stranger who seemed to understand the daily woes of the ordinary man.

The next day the most extraordinary good fortune came to Andrew. As he seized an opportunity to ask John some of his surging questions the young stranger passed by. John turned and motioned the two young men together with a strange, mystical phrase that Andrew hardly understood. The stranger beckoned, and Andrew followed him.

Long after the early dusk had shut down on the canyon, Andrew came home to the rude tent he shared with John's other disciples. This time he walked on air, alive with a second baptism of joy. "His name is Jesus," Andrew told himself, trying to remember every detail of that glorious afternoon, "and he comes from Galilee like me. And he thinks John's the greatest man that ever lived, because he expects the kingdom of God now, not somewhere far ahead. But Jesus doesn't believe you can scare people into being good, and some day he's going to go out himself and tell them all how their heavenly Father loves them. And when he does, oh, I'll follow him!"

Andrew arrived at camp to find it in utmost confusion. "Where is John?" the first people he met demanded. "Have you seen John?" Andrew had not seen John, but he leaped to a conclusion that later proved to be right.

"Gone? Then Herod's got him at last! You know how he threatened to, if John didn't stop preaching against him.—But who'd dream Herod would dare take him from a crowd like this!" Though he joined the crowd of searchers, he knew in his heart that he would never see John again.

The next morning people accepted the inevitable, packed their tents on their donkeys and trailed homeward with

grief-stricken faces. Andrew himself started back up the river valley from Capernaum, feeling as though the bottom had dropped out of his little world. After all, he was not surprised that Herod had had John arrested. Those vast crowds seeking deliverance were so much gunpowder, and one spark would have set them off and hurled them blazing against Herod's palace, or against the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. True, John had told them repeatedly that he was not their appointed deliverer, the Messiah, but how long would they have believed him?

The worst of it was, there was still no sign of the promised kingdom of heaven. Even John had not known when God would come—perhaps, now that he was gone, God would never come! Andrew stopped short in his tracks at the awful thought. Then he relaxed, for he remembered the young stranger, to whom the rule of God was a living reality. Some words of Jesus came back to Andrew, reassuring him. It was the message which Jesus was going to bring, when he went forth to take up John's work and carry it forward:

"The kingdom of heaven is within you. . . . So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knows not how . . . first the blade and then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. . . . *Come, follow me!*"

Andrew's sore heart was eased a little by the memory. He made light work of the fifty miles homeward, for he knew that when Jesus was ready, he would call for Andrew and his friends because he needed them. Together they would go joyfully out to tell everybody that the kingdom of love had come.

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